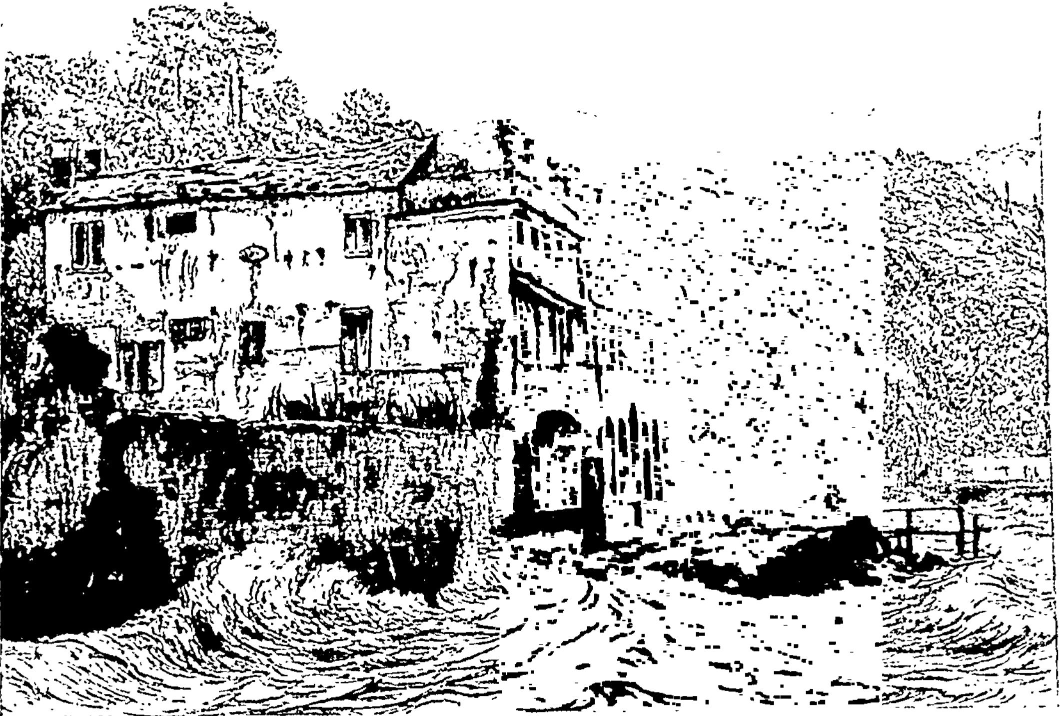
SHELLEY AND THE UNROMANTICS



CASA MAGNI, SAN TERENZO

FROM AN ETCHING BY ARTHUR EVERSHED AFTER THE WATER-COLOUR BY HENRY RODERICK NEWMAN

SHELLEY AND THE UNROMANTICS

BY

OLWEN WARD CAMPBELL

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

SECOND EDITION

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TO

JAMES AND MARY WARD

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

IN HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF A PROUD DEBT

NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

A NEW Edition of this book having been called for unexpectedly soon, I have only been able to make a few corrections suggested by the criticisms of its many generous reviewers and by various kind friends.

March, 1924

PREFACE

IT is the custom nowadays to apologize for adding another book to the number already existing on any famous poet. Yet poets are to this extent also like chameleons, that they appear to be always changing in the lights and shadows of succeeding generations; but—" 'Tis we, 'tis ours are changed, not they." By continually looking at them with fresh eyes we may catch something more of the spirit which underlies their forms, provided always that we do not exhaust our sight in chronicling their spots.

Only when that intense individuality of nature and outlook which is the essence of a poet's greatness has won practically universal recognition is his resurrection in the minds of men complete. We continue to quarrel about Shelley—less violently perhaps of late, but not less fundamentally.

My view of Shelley's character is entirely founded upon his own works, particularly his letters, and upon the profound impression his unusual personality made on contemporaries very unlike himself.

A posterity which has far more in common with him, might find, I believe, in his poems a deeper relevance to modern problems, and a truer source of encouragement and help than is usually supposed.

CAMBRIDGE
August, 1923

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SHELLEY'S READERS

"What boots it, Shelley! that the breeze
Carried thy lovely wail away,
Musical through Italian trees
Which fringe thy soft blue Spezzian bay?
Inheritors of thy distress,
Have restless hearts one throb the less?"
Matthew Arnold.

SHELLEY is the most tantalizing of poets. He is a star round which the moths of speculation continue to flutter, baffled and mystified by his life and personality, by his poetry oftener dazzled than illuminated. If we look too hard and long at him, he tends to elude us: the laborious annotator, the painstaking and particular biographer, often end by catching but the merest twinkle—the body of their light is gone. For many he shone in youth, but seems unreal and dim to the eyes of middle age: to some he shows brilliant flashes of beauty and truth, and the rest of him is in shadow. Looking across the wide heavens of our literature we are always arrested by his strange fire, burning intensely, and apart. For he belongs to no constellation; though he rose in company with many, he pursues an orbit of his own, and feeds his flame upon a different air. He is a bright but aimless meteor to some; a lodestar to others, of whom yet hardly any two can agree whither he beacons.

He has been perhaps the most discussed poet of the past hundred years—though not by any means always as poet. Various obscure sects have used his works for purposes of propaganda. Vegetarianism, Mormonism, Spiritualism, each has had a claim upon him. Atheists and Theists have divided

him between them. While philosophers quote him to illuminate their most difficult conceptions, mere æsthetes maintain that his poetry is an obvious case of Art for Art's sake. He has been an inspiration to democratic and socialistic movements. He is one of the few poets often quoted by men of science. His poetical influence has affected writers as widely different as Browning and Swinburne; and he is in a way responsible for much of what is worst in the one, and best in the other. Children at school often waken to a sense of poetry through learning *The Cloud* by heart; and would perhaps remain awake if the vast indiscriminate ensuing doses of Tennyson did not befuddle them entirely. Old men console themselves for the thought of death by reading the end of *Adonais*. Preachers encourage their flocks in time of trouble by reciting the closing lines of *Prometheus Unbound*: despite the fact that Faber threw his whole Shelley into the fire, and never regretted it. Shelley is one of the most frequently quoted poets; but it is still true that the bulk of his work is very little read. He has found idolators by the score, and defamers by the dozen, but very few wise critics.

His life and character have been discussed and fought over still more fiercely than his poetry. And here also undiscriminating praise has done him, since his death, as much harm as slander. He has been bedevilled, to use Trelawny's word, by people without sensibility, and deified by people without humour. Even Professor Dowden, labouring at his long and valuable *Life of Shelley*, conscientiously and lovingly, did his idol no good by the excess of his anxiety to justify him. He is too ready to fling the cloak of his sentimental eloquence over the tiniest puddles lest Shelley should acquire a touch of earth.

It is a plain fact that the slanders levelled at Shelley in his lifetime have not yet ceased to damage him. They are responsible for a wholly false attitude to the man and his work; for a sentimental Shelley-worship, and tedious Shelley-whitewashing, on the one hand, and still more tedious defamation on the other. The effect has been that many people, entirely or almost entirely unaware of the grounds for their disapproval, harbour a vague sense of distrust of Shelley. This disapproval acts more powerfully upon the middle-aged, hence the many elders who look back on their enthusiasm for him as one of the dangerous illusions of youth. These slanders have been largely the cause why he has had, not merely adverse critics, but critics who were enemies. The muscular prejudices of Kingsley

swell at the thought of him, and once engaged, never hesitate to hit below the belt. Even the gentle Matthew Arnold writes of him with extraordinary animus. These were open enemies. He has also suffered from veiled attacks—from such insults as the false and noxious praise of Francis Thompson; from the championship of æsthetes and Sansculottes; and from the condescending patronage of pure materialists, incapable of taking him seriously, yet vaguely fascinated. It was, for example, with Hogg and Peacock that the pernicious myth of the "eternal child" first began.

[illegible] unsubstantial; the admission even on the part of his admirers that there is something ethereal and feminine about his work, seem vaguely connected with the belief that his life was a failure and his character irresolute. The apparent inconsistency of soaring idealism and weak self-indulgent conduct was what stirred the resentment of Arnold, desperately struggling to [illegible] Truth and seriousness" he did not find in him: only a beautiful "haze of words and images"—an unwholesome and seductive atmosphere.[1] Seductive to Arnold himself, tragically; recalling him, as he perhaps felt, to something he had foresworn. He found in Shelley "charm for our soul"—but "an incurable want," which he describes as a want of sound subject-matter.

Whether or no Arnold might have modified his opinions of Shelley's poetry if he had seen the events of his life in a rather different light, he remains without comparison the most formidable of his adversaries. He is formidable because he understood the purposes of poetry, as Shelley understood them; and he was spiritually akin to Shelley in many ways. If Shelley's poetry did not actually inspire much of Arnold's, then it was suffering like his which inspired it:

> "The lights that rain their steady glow
> Like stars on life's cold sea,
> Which others know, or say they know—
> They never shone for me.

[1] Kingsley compares the habit of reading Shelley to "the private sipping of Eau de Cologne."

"Thoughts light, like gleams, my spirit's sky,
But they will not remain.
They light me once, they hurry by
And never come again." [1]

It is Shelley's voice, but passion has aged into melancholy.

"I too have felt the load I bore
In a too strong emotion's sway;
I too have wished, no woman more,
This starting, feverish heart away.

. . . .

"How sweet to feel, on the boon air,
All our unquiet pulses cease!
To feel that nothing can impair
The gentleness, the thirst for peace.

"The gentleness too rudely hurl'd
On this wild earth of hate and fear,
The thirst for peace a raving world
Would never let us satiate here." [2]

Here was a heart longing like Shelley's for love, and for calm and power within. And how like Shelley's are his exhortations to his fainting soul:

"Resolve to be thyself and know that he
Who finds himself loses his misery." [3]

When we come to examine the subject-matter of Arnold's poetry we shall find it apparently not widely different from Shelley's. Both might be called "philosophical" poets. Both were mainly concerned with expressing the longing of man's spiritual nature, and his discontent with earthly life. Both wrote some very personal, almost one might say egoistical, poems. Both were inspired by Greek models and wrote dramas based on the Greek, with choruses and lyrical passages, and between *Empedocles* and *Prometheus Unbound* there is more than a superficial resemblance. Both wrote love poems—mainly of restless and unhappy love. Each wrote a famous elegy.

And yet Arnold turned and rent Shelley, and said that his

[1] Compare, for example, Shelley's "*Ye Gentle Visitations of Calm Thought.*"
[2] Compare, for instance, the "*Stanzas Written in Dejection.*"
[3] Compare Shelley's Sonnet, "*Political Greatness*":

". . . Man who man would be,
Must rule the empire of himself; in it
Must be supreme, establishing his throne
On vanquished will, quelling the anarchy
Of hopes and fears, being himself alone."

poetry would never last; was convinced that he was incapable of really understanding "moral ideas"; and that all his visions and high prophecies were as irrelevant to the problems of human life in general, as they were inconsistent with his own. But as Shelley obviously owned some kind of sway over him, he is prepared to console himself and us, after having maintained that Shelley was not much of a poet, and very little of a man, by dwelling upon his personal charms—his blushing, feminine, artless face: an attraction "to which we have to add," he concludes, "the charm of the man's writings"; of these he has left himself no space to speak, but he declares them to be at once angelic, beautiful, mad and useless.

It seems on the whole a very curious critique; but, in the main, it is merely summing up the attitude to Shelley which existed from the time he first began to write. A contemporary of his at Oxford, who ironically refers to him as "our Apollo," writes, with perfect justification, of the *Margaret Nicholson* poems that they are "extremely dull, but the Author is a great genius, and, if he be not clapped up in Bedlam or hanged, will certainly prove one of the sweetest swans on the tuneful margins of the Charwell."[1] But when, years later, Shelley had redeemed this youthful doggerel by publishing the *Cenci*, the same writer acknowledges that it is "well-written," but by a bad, mad, wicked Shelley still. "Nobody," said Hazlitt, "was ever wiser or better for reading Shelley." According to Lamb—who was not even in a good enough humour with Shelley to poke fun at him, though he is such an excellent subject, as his idolators will never see; according to Lamb, Shelley's poems are "thin sown with profit or delight." In his preface to *Philip van Artevelde*, dated 1834, Sir Henry Taylor wrote that a reader would find "his stock of permanent impressions, of recurring thoughts, of pregnant recollections . . . no more enriched by having read Mr. Shelley's poems than by having gazed on so many gorgeously coloured clouds in an evening sky." And in answer to Swinburne's protest he merely reiterated, however gently, that he found in Shelley's poetry "a want of relevancy to the truths of life and nature." "Shelley's creed," said Leslie Stephen, "means only a vague longing." "Shelley teaches us nothing and leads us nowhere," said Arthur Symons, "but cries and flies round us like a sea-bird." Shelley is "a sentimentalist pure and simple," shouts Kingsley, "incapable of anything like inductive reasoning;

[1] See letters from Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, published in the *Diary of Lady Charlotte Bury*.

unable to take cognizance of any facts but those which please his taste, or to draw any conclusion from them but such as also please his taste. . . A nature utterly womanish." While a present-day critic of note informs us that Shelley is a "beautiful soul" who "can neither comprehend nor create."[1]

The views expressed by these well-known critics, and by many of less note, may be taken to represent the feelings of large numbers of readers—and not only of unappreciative readers. It is a common experience to meet rapturous Shelleyans who cannot read the *Revolt of Islam*, and who will admit, if pressed, that *Prometheus* is really a little mad; who admire most of the longer poems as rhapsodies, and would place the *Witch of Atlas* high, simply because it appears to them a more completely phantastical Phantasia than, for instance, the *Lines among the Euganean Hills*, and only equalled in this vein by *Epipsychidion* itself. Even men like Stopford Brooke and Clutton Brock—authors of much wise and deep appreciation of Shelley—seem ready to admit that his poetry may not be fundamentally either true or helpful to life.

Now this widespread belief that Shelley fails as a constructive poet would be of no great consequence if he had merely aimed at being a successful artist. He might then be supposed to rest content with having achieved, as even his enemies admit, some of the most flawless lyrics of the world. But he had a very different view of poetry from that which must have belonged to an Ovid or a Herrick. His conception of its power and scope can only be equalled in the enthusiastic pages of Arnold himself. "The future of poetry is immense," said Arnold, "because in poetry, when it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. . . . Without poetry our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry." "Poetry," had Shelley said before him, "is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. . . ." The poetic faculty, he declared, "contains within itself the seeds at once of its own and of social renovation." "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

It is clear that with this conception of the function of poetry, Shelley must be the fraud that Arnold felt him, or he must at least have aimed at something more in his own poems than is

[1] Professor Grierson, in the Warton Lecture to the British Academy, 1920.

found there, either by those who read him simply for his word-music and pure artistry, or by those who regard his poetical material in general as mere rhapsody. And it is plain from his life, his prefaces and letters, that he did aim at something more. He had begun by renouncing poetry, because he thought it of little practical help to mankind. All his half-comic excursions into the common world, his pompous orations to the Irish poor, his vehement pamphlets and Quixotic public work, were dictated by the very same spirit which afterwards inspired his poetry. Only when his practical efforts had failed did he give himself entirely, with increasing pleasure, but never with complete confidence, to the ambition of being a poet. And he pursued poetry, not that she might amuse or even redeem his contemporaries only, but as a light unto posterity. An assurance of immortality seemed to him a necessary condition of his work. Moreover, the posterity to which he looked was something very like our present age. The mere material conditions of life made his own times, as he seems to have felt, unfit to receive his peculiar message. Our own age—materially more at ease, more democratic, free-thinking, scientific and energetic—is the very kind of posterity Shelley would have wished to address.

We are sometimes told that in so far as Shelley had a definite aim, it was a political one; he aimed at establishing a millennium on Godwinian lines; and his message was that we must destroy tyrants and give up religion, and abolish the marriage laws, and then the millennium will automatically appear. He is often said to have had an "hysterically over-simplified view of life,"[1] to have supposed that evil was some kind of disease with which man was infected from without, and never to have been struck with the idea that the follies and crimes of the world were the outcome of anything that is natural in the species.[2] If he really intended to instruct his fellows on the basis of so very crude a notion of man's problems, and with the object of presenting them with so very dismal a form of human happiness as would result from universal Godwinism; and if he actually hoped to achieve this aim by poetry, he is, indeed, a subject for ridicule. We might be content to turn him down, as his old school-fellow did, only with laughter instead of tears: "Poor dear Shelley, it was no wonder he went wrong."

Some passages in the earlier poems might be cited to support

[1] See Sidney Waterlow's book on Shelley, chap. iii.
[2] See Brailsford, p 222 of *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*, in many ways a most valuable and interesting little book.

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this extraordinary view, but there is practically no pure preaching, either political or ethical, in any work later than *Islam*. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* he denies that his poems are in the least didactic, or contain "in any degree a reasoned system on the theory of human life." The one aim he consistently admits is that of ennobling and encouraging.

We are left with two alternatives. He may have failed to realize his own ideals, through some fault in his nature, and his attitude to life, or he may have been misunderstood.

It is quite true that there are some queer flaws in Shelley's work—even in his mature work. He often blindly sacrifices his poetry to a cold metaphysical or political theory. He sometimes "writes tenderly, but is not tender";[1] he is sometimes at once sentimental and inhuman. A sudden shadow certainly passed now and again over his moral and poetical instinct. But such shadows have fallen also upon Keats, and Wordsworth, and Milton—and at least upon the page of Shakespeare.

A more disturbing accusation might be brought against him, though it never has been made, namely, that often where his influence has fallen most powerfully we find weak, morbid, and disordered lives. Beddoes, who deeply admired him, and to whom was due the publication, in 1824, of the *Posthumous Poems*, sank deeper and deeper into morbid melancholy, and ended by committing suicide. To James Thomson, Shelley was the will-o'-the-wisp in his fever-swamp. Francis Thompson, wandering in the gloomy and inhuman wastes of his metaphysical catholicism, and so out of touch with the creative and moral aims of poetry that he could ridicule as a senseless superstition the applause of posterity, loved Shelley—as a sickly child loves sweets: guiltily, fretfully, perversely. Swinburne loved him nobly—and so doing yet lived ignobly. Shelley enthusiasts are frequently people of obvious instability of temperament and unsuitability to life; often they are intellectuals of the most unfortunate type—miserable with all their brains.

But these men, and their century, may, to a greater or less degree, have misunderstood Shelley—and not Shelley only. Kingsley bitterly complained: "When we see poetry dying down among us, year by year, although the age is becoming year by year more marvellous and inspiring, we have a right to look for some false principle in a school which has had so little enduring vitality, which seems now able to perpetuate nothing of itself but its vices." If one generation has really the right

[1] Landor on Euripides, in *Pericles and Aspasia*.

to blame its own artistic failures on the preceding one, what might not *we* say of the Victorians! Why did Kingsley never look within for false principles? And did Arnold ever ask himself whether there were not better things to inherit from Shelley than his "distress"—"Inheritors of thy distress"?

Before we finally acquiesce in the verdict of the majority, that Shelley's dreams are a fool's paradise where one of the most divinely duped of men took refuge from the truth, and his stormy life the price he paid for his illusions; before we [illegible]

his poetry have been rightly interpreted. And let us begin by seeking to discover what impression he made as a man upon the remarkable and diverse persons who were his intimates in life.

CHAPTER II

SHELLEY'S BIOGRAPHERS AND FRIENDS

" . . . while near his feet grim lions couch,
And kids, fearless from love, creep near his lair.
Even the blind worms seem to feel the sound.
The birds are silent, hanging down their heads,

. . . .

Nor even the nightingale intrudes a note
In rivalry, but all entranced she listens."

Shelley: Fragment, " Orpheus."

ORPHEUS in the strange circle of his random beasts, rendered only temporarily docile under his spell, was not more curiously placed than Shelley among his friends. No two were alike, in anything but their devotion to himself; hardly one in the remotest degree resembled him; several of them, except where he was concerned, were violent, unprincipled, gross, cold, or selfish. The chief of them are seven in number, and telling them over is like calling for a march past of the Seven Deadly Sins. There is Trelawny, with his irredeemable vanity and raging temper; the covetous Godwin, the lecherous Byron, the slipshod Hunt, the sly Medwin, the disdainful Peacock, and the gluttonous Hogg.

Five out of this main group of seven—all, that is, except Godwin and Byron—have, each after his manner, written reminiscences of the poet. Byron has recorded some impressions of Shelley; Godwin was almost completely silent. That the composite portrait thus given to us is almost without an incongruous line can only be due to the power of the original, whose qualities were so striking and sincere that no one of his amazing biographer-friends could misinterpret him, though several of them were accomplished liars. The more we know of their personalities, the more impressive becomes their testimony.

TRELAWNY

In this unique and original group one figure demands and obtains the lion's share of our wondering attention.



E J TRELAWNY

FROM A PORTRAIT AFTER SEVERN

Edward John Trelawny was a portent. His arrogant, adventurous, cruel, reckless nature seemed to be fired out upon the earth like a meteoric stone slowly to scorch itself away, rather than born to die. His links with the ordinary human world were of the fewest and strangest. He *had* parents, but to judge from his autobiographical *Adventures of a Younger Son*, he would much have preferred to have had none. He had a brother, sisters, and several wives, but all these relationships merely goaded him to fury. As he exclaims in a letter written when he was seventy-eight: "The weak cling to their relations—I have always detested and avoided mine." And in another letter: "Marriage is only suitable to stupid people." His life consisted in a perpetual severing of all restraints and ties—parents, a home, a nation, a creed; he would have none of them. He left his home for the Navy, and the Navy for piracy, and before his twentieth year was running through the world, like a savage with a knife between his teeth, seeking blood, and glory, and pleasure. He hated his own country, and despised all others; vengeance he loved, though he once renounced it; he revelled in his own good looks, and in his triumphs of force and passion; he joined the cause of the oppressed, because to measure himself against tyrants rejoiced his brave savagery; his first thirty years were spent in the service of but one ideal—the pride of life. He was brilliant, versatile, untaught, tireless, unscrupulous, sensual, and wild; but when in his thirtieth year he first knew Shelley, he was filled with admiration and love, and of him he wrote: "The gross and sensual passions and feelings that link men together had no hold on him. In benevolence and friendship none could excel him. . . . The truth was, Shelley loved everything better than himself." For all the praise that Trelawny throughout his life lavished upon Shelley, Shelley must not have the whole credit. Somewhere in the depths of the Pirate's nature there must have been some refinement both of judgment and feeling: for, all uneducated and undisciplined as he was, he instantl[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] that it was greater than [illegible] of adventure. From that time he took a deep interest in literature, and above all in poetry, and in the confidence of his unfaltering vanity he became himself an author. He never spelt or wrote correctly, but the vigorous

fluency with which his two books are written is little less than miraculous. He used language as he used his sword—with no hesitation, and little discretion, but with unfaltering force. So far, and no further, did emulation take him: blind egoism, conceit, and brutality disfigured everything he wrote. The *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author*, written, as he said, "as a tribute of my great love for the memory of Shelley, his life and moral character," reveal in a few precious passages the charm and power of the one poet, but the surly Byron and the swaggering Author almost crowd the gentle Shelley out of the book.

Trelawny, however, did not meet Shelley till January, 1822, so that his collection of conversations and anecdotes is remarkably rich for but six months of intercourse. The changeableness and inaccuracy shown by Trelawny so frequently all through his life would detract from the value of his records of Shelley, were these not so convincingly alive and consistent. No one familiar with Shelley's letters and other records of his personality could doubt their general truth. All that was added in the second edition of his book, relating to Mrs. Shelley and her relations to her husband, counts for nothing. His feelings for her changed, and changed again; his feeling for Shelley was the most constant influence of his life.

The *Adventures of a Younger Son* has been oftener praised than read; and oftener read than judged with an impartial mind. When it was first published—under a most prudent anonymity—a reviewer in the *Athenæum* described the career and crimes of its hero as those of a savage, and questioned the "utility of drawing a character in which there is not a single redeeming point." His reward is to be told by Edward Garnett, that not for the squeamish stomachs of himself and of old ladies were written the passages of bloodshed, nor for their bad taste intended the freshness and vigour of "this work of rare brilliancy if not of genius." The opinion voiced by Garnett has held the field. Even a lady (Mrs. Julian Marshall) found it possible to write of Trelawny's book as a romance of adventure—"and very amusing it is, though rather gruesome in some of its details."

Drama and fiction have many passages painful to read, and most painful to visualize. Yet we should call that reader squeamish who neglected on their account works of power and feeling. There is a place in literature even for scenes of bloodshed; but there is a manner of presenting them. Trelawny's book is a book of adventure that almost entirely lacks the magic of romance; a story of cruelty, lust, murder,

of being revenged; "the horrible ferocity with which I slaughtered these besotted barbarians was often enough aroused by the slightest provocation."

There is one thing in such a book that we might have been spared—and that is gush. But no; Trelawny, we find is a sentimentalist and can write, though nearly always in this case, with the greatest affectation, about freedom, which he mainly honoured in his own person, about friendship, in which he was extraordinarily inconstant, and about what Garnett calls romance. The artificial incidents relating to his supposed courtship and marriage of a young Arab are as incongruous with his own account of his vicious and heartless youth as they are with what we know of his subsequent life.

"Dear Mary," he ejaculates in the middle of a letter to Mrs. Shelley, "I love women, and you know it, but my life is not dedicated to them; it is to men I write, and my first three volumes are principally adapted to sailors." One might have expected that Mary would have been convinced *ad nauseam* of the peculiar truth of these statements before she had read far in her friend's book. Instead, though she admits that there are one or two "blemishes," she finds much that is "beautiful and imaginative and exalting." So the blemishes remained for the benefit of the sailors, and among much that is disgusting they are conspicuously so.

To find this monstrosity of a book full of romance, "poetry, and fire, rare in English prose," [1] argues at least a temporary paralysis of the moral feelings—to say nothing of the literary ones; to criticize it too earnestly might seem to argue a paralysed sense of humour. But then there is no humour in it, or almost none; murder—wanton murder—makes, after all, as poor a joke as it makes a dull story, and Trelawny by his arrogance and earnestness about the book challenges us to take it seriously.

The man is easier to forgive than his book. His blunt exposure of all his sins almost disarms criticism. "I am so hardened in doing wrong," he writes to Clare on one occasion when he had been nearly drowned in swimming Niagara, "that it is a pity I was not drowned." Here was a twinge of genuine feeling, but his frankness seems usually, like that of Benvenuto Cellini, whom he resembled in many ways, to be mere conceit and impatience. Repentance seemed to both men a mere waste of energy, and good resolutions, which they knew they would never keep, a waste of time.

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[1] Garnett's Introduction.

master, as he was every man's; but cutting to pieces a feather-bed would have seemed to the Cornishman a very poor kind of vengeance. The unfortunate man who cheated Trelawny paid for it in his person. Benvenuto was in some respects a more honourable sinner. Trelawny at heart despised women, and usually ended by hating those with whom he had any connexion. Cellini, with singular simplicity, acknowledges the debt of his art to the kindness of his mistresses.

Exactly how many times Trelawny was married, and what became of his wives, nobody knows. He had one before he met Shelley in Italy, and one soon after[1]—the sister of the chieftain for whom he fought in Greece, a girl of twelve, whom he made the mother of a child (the Zella of his letters) and deserted in a year or so. And in 1857 he suddenly remarks in the middle of a letter to an old friend: "I have a wife, two sons and one daughter." Very soon after this he was living alone. He seems to have had various children of various nationalities, and these poor little waifs crop up suddenly in his correspondence, reminding us again of Benvenuto. "This," says Cellini, "was the first daughter I ever had, to my knowledge." His little Greek daughter he really cared for, and took some trouble about

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Trelawny never learned from experience, he tried killing women, and he tried marrying them—but ignore them he could not. In his books and letters he cannot be silent about them; he is for ever raving over them, or gibing at them. Everything they did provoked him; they were the plague of his life. Oddly enough, he persistently turned to women for sympathy in this matter of his misogyny, and demanded

[1] The interval being occupied in wooing Clare Clairmont.

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consolation from them for the vexation they caused him. He never expected them to resent his behaviour. It is plain that he never had the slightest misgiving when he proposed to marry Mary Shelley, that she might be a little dubious about living with his cupboard full of skeletons, kept always so frankly and ingenuously with the door wide open.

Nor do we gather that Mary refused Trelawny from any squeamishness about his past. He was the darling of what, though usually with less good reason, he called the "absurd womenkind," and when Mary first met him she was obviously very much attracted. She continued to be through life his devoted and helpful friend, only to be rewarded, years after her death, by malicious and contemptuous references to her in the final edition of his *Records*. It is hard to find any reason for this quite gratuitous bad feeling. It was not due to any annoyance on Trelawny's part that Mary refused to marry him. Had she done so, he would soon have been much more violently annoyed. As it was, they continued on good terms to the end of her life. Partly it may have been caused by a kind of jealousy of Mary's intimate relation to his hero (though that intimate relation was probably his reason for wishing to marry her), or to a growing conviction that she *was* not, because she could not have been, worthy of him. Partly, too, Trelawny's spite against the sex which had been such a trouble to him, made him very ready in old age to dispute the claims of a single member of it to courage, intellect, or magnanimity.

A curious meanness was not the least strange element in Trelawny's most unnatural nature, but that he had it there is no denying; moreover, it was not confined to his dealings with women. Knowing, as he did, that Byron was intensely sensitive to his lameness, and took every means in his power to conceal all knowledge of it from the world, that is, without exception, one of the beastliest acts ever perpetrated by one man upon the barely cold body of another, which Trelawny brazenly reports himself to have committed in Byron's lodging at Missolonghi. Having made some excuse to rid himself for a few moments of Byron's faithful valet, he instantly uncovered the corpse, and made his notes upon the nature of Byron's deformity. Nor does his baseness stop at that. In the first edition of the *Records* he gave a so exaggerated account of the state of Byron's limbs that he was obliged in a later edition to modify his statements enormously. Though still able in his *Records* to make much of his own superiority to Byron as an athlete, only veiled, he tells us, by his consideration for

Byron's vanity, and able to dwell upon the contrast between the lame poet and his own triumphant, handsome manhood (of which he was so vain), he could no longer pretend that both Byron's legs were withered to the knee, "the feet and legs of a sylvan satyr."

With Trelawny the mood's the thing—it is love or hate, scorn or enthusiasm, spite or championship; to change was his freedom. Soon after Byron's death he writes to Mary Shelley of his grief, and says: "I am sick at heart with losing my friend—with all his weakness, you know I loved him. I cannot live with men for years without feeling." Four months later to the same correspondent he writes: "By the gods! the lies that are said in his praise urge one to speak the truth. It is well for his name, and better for Greece, that he is dead. . . . I now feel my face burn with shame that so weak
I wish he
ssed how I
triumphed
over his weak spirit." All that had happened to Trelawny in the interval was successful fighting and successful love—and to triumph with Trelawny meant to trample.

The joys of the victorious warrior, such as they are, were Trelawny's by right, for among his virtues was an altogether admirable worship for physical health and efficiency. With all his sensuality and freedom to indulge it, he never allowed his pleasures to slacken a muscle of his vigorous frame. A remarkable passage in the *Adventures of a Younger Son*, written in his dashing and sometimes humorous manner, illustrates this reverence—one of the few he owned. After a grisly description of a plague by which "the grey-haired race, the broad-chested, long-limbed, bright-eyed, gaunt, and spare-bodied were rarely pursued," he writes: "The great feeders and fat-buttocked never escaped. I loathe greasy and haunchy brutes as Moses and Mahomet loathed swine, and rejoice in their extermination. . . . Gout, apoplexy, dropsy and the stone, I laud, respect, and salute with my hat off, for they are in their nature radicals, the fierce slayers of kings and priests, the grasping wealthy, and the greedy glutton. When the parson robs the poor cottager of his corn and tithe pigs, though his conscience may never prick him his grea
toe often d s to grunt with
him till in fast hold on
throat, he apoplexy."

Almost to the very end of his long life Trelawny wore overcoat, bathed, and took strenuous exercise—the ills of age

he would not, and he did not, have. Yet we should expect that to a nature such as his, old age would be an intolerable burden, to be endured resentfully and with stubborn bitterness. But here again he is incalculable. A burden it was. "Age has no pleasures," he says; "we must grin and bear it as best we can." He bore it far better, more wisely, and more kindly, than he bore his youth. The old man's letters are more fiercely defiant, more scornful and cynical than ever; he has lost all faith in men and their destiny, in love and life; but he is not querulous, and he is never ill-tempered. Hoping nothing, and believing nothing, he yet endures heroically the darkness of his own soul. His unbelief is not untouched with humour, sometimes even a little reminiscent of the rueful humorousness of Lamb. "Don't you like the absent best?" he writes to the absent Clare. "Those present—always present—we can't help daily wishing dead; and old friends are a heavy curse—they treat us like an old umbrella; give me everything new—all old things are utterly worthless, aren't they, Clare?—only and always, excepting me." And to the same: "We have both lingered beyond our time—we should make room for others—we have played out our little game, and have had enough of it—life is but a donkey sweepstakes, so good-bye." And again to Clare, an old lady of seventy-five: "My dear Clare, you have made a great rent in our correspondence. Are you ill or farming in Austria?"

These letters to Clare Clairmont [1] celebrate one of the strangest of friendships. They were first effusive love-letters; from that they suddenly changed into a style of kindly, critical, teasing intimacy, and continued in that vein till Clare's death in 1879. What kept the faithless Trelawny so constant to this queer friendship was probably that Clare had the power of satisfying the one and only passion of his old age—his passion to think, speak, and write of Shelley.

His love for Shelley was, without comparison, the noblest thing in his life. It stood him in place of religion, and exercised a more and more mellowing influence upon him. Nothing else had held him; his adventures, his wild pleasures and far voyagings, he reverted to no more. "Life is very long," he wrote, "considering how little we do with it that's worth doing. I am amazed at the vanity and folly of my past life. We are a world of fools and mad people, and I shan't regret leaving it." In 1869 he writes to Clare: "We are almost the last of

[1] A valuable publication given to the world in 1910 by Buxton Forman, whose editing, however, unfortunately consists—as so often—of a vulgar and irrelevant introduction, and a few uninstructive notes.

the band that clustered round and worshipped the lorn and outraged Poet—his slanderers are forgotten and his genius and excellence acknowledged—in my love for Shelley and so rarely speaking to anyone that knew him, everything else vanishes from my mind."

He is occasionally a little inconsistent in these last letters about Shelley, of whose life he really knew very little, for they were not on intimate terms—sometimes attributing to him a life no better than his own had been, at other times he speaks of him as one whose every act from youth to maturity [illegible] wonderful [illegible] fe had [illegible] And he that had hardly owned a real purpose in life, persisted in one aim to the end and realized it—the aim of being buried at Shelley's side.

In 1823 he wrote to Mary from Rome describing the place where he was interring Shelley's ashes: "I have just planted six young cypresses and four laurels. My own stone, a plain slab till I can decide on some fitting inscription, is placed on the left hand. I have likewise dug my grave, so that, when I die, there is only to lift up my coverlet and roll me into it. You may lie on the other side if you like."

In 1880 we find him writing to the custodian of the English cemetery at Rome commissioning him "to put my tomb in thorough repair," and stating that his ashes would "be enclosed in a box about the same size as *my friend the Poet's.*" The following year thither were they borne.

By sheer devotion, and by his unique volume of reminiscences, Trelawny has earned his place as one of Shelley's friends. But his feeling was never warmly returned by Shelley.[1] It could not be. More than anything else, Shelley wanted what Edward Williams gave him—frank, happy, affectionate com-

[1] Shelley always mentioned [illegible] terms with, those friends he [illegible] when writing to Hunt, is: " [illegible] a wild but kind-hearted sea- [illegible] formal and mainly about *business*—if we except the passage in which he asks him to *procure* him some prussic acid. Shelley knew his man, and felt that such a *request* would more likely be executed by the wild sea-man [illegible] was originally [illegible] but in a letter [illegible] fessor Dowden's [illegible] leaves the pass [illegible] to become the [illegible] exaggerated th [illegible]

panionship. Trelawny was not really frank nor genuinely happy—and gentleness, so dear to the poet, he never knew. His worth for his contemporaries, and for us now, is in the sheer fascination and force of his extraordinary person and career. He cannot be ignored. Though only preserved to us on paper, his vitality leaps out of the dull world of print; his letters, and to a less extent his books, master us with their vigorous style, and compel us to receive his individuality.

As for his portraits—whether of the young adventurer or of the old sea-captain—as Shelley said of some drawings in illustration of Faust, it makes the "brain swim round, only to touch the leaf on the opposite side of which" we know that fierce, handsome, defiant face awaits us, with what Swinburne called "the eyes of the storm-bird."

LEIGH HUNT

No two men brought together by their common love for Shelley could present a greater contrast than Trelawny and Leigh Hunt.

While Trelawny rowdied and murdered in the name of freedom, Hunt, in the true cause of liberty, suffered a mild and dignified martyrdom. While Trelawny hurried from one adventure to another, and from one love to another, Hunt, with his large and devoted family gathered round him, endured with a gentle passivity which in the mother of many might have been called heroic. He was the one good man among these seven familiars of Shelley's, and Shelley loved him with a deep and unwavering affection. As he appears in Shelley's letters, he is a noble and lovable figure; as he gazes out at us with his great eyes from that exquisite miniature in the National Portrait Gallery,[1] he is at least lovable; but as he reveals himself in his autobiography and other writings, he is seen as that effusively unimpassioned person, that eloquently unimpressive writer whom posterity remembers for other sakes than his own.

Shelley once wrote to Hunt of Byron: "He has many generous and exalted qualities, but the canker of aristocracy wants to be cut out, and something, God knows, wants to be cut out of us all—except perhaps you!" After reading the autobiography we feel that in any case an operation of the sort on Hunt would certainly be fatal, his vital organs being so near the surface. He was not a man devoid of feeling, by no means; but he felt, as he lived, with so much ease. He would take nothing hard. If a grain of harsh fortune in-

[1] See illustration facing p. 146.

truded itself into his lot, he knew how to turn it to smooth consolation and delicate advantage. Imprisonment revealed the generosity of strangers, while poverty intensified the kindness of friends. His patience and sweetness in adversity stood him in good stead; he belonged in his way to Lamb's "great race," and to him even Byron opened his grudging purse. "Taking no more thought than lilies," by his meekness he inherited.

In an age bristling with unhappy marriages, Hunt was devotedly attached to a woman, by no means faultless, whom her own son, with his father's candour, describes as "the reverse of handsome." He rejoiced in the number of his offspring with the disinterested *naïveté* of Micawber himself. Not even the Muse visited this genial fellow with her accustomed severity. Occasionally, when his themes were tragic, he was made, he says, to flush and perspire; but he seems to have shed no bitterer drops. "*Rimini*," as a recent critic remarks, "is pervaded throughout by a free, cheerful, and animated spirit, notwithstanding the tragic nature of the theme." When his first youthful vanity had died down, Hunt was able to regard his powers with a diffident satisfaction. As it were from the downy refuge of an arm-chair, his conscience surveyed in later life, with an unrestrained and comfortable candour, the faults of himself—the author and the man. With easy impartiality he confessed his faults and reckoned over his failings, as an epicure his bottles of new wine—little imperfections and incompletenesses which the loving hand of Time would make acceptable to posterity.

Leigh Hunt was not a "creator," he was a "sympathizer"—and not only with himself. Though he identified himself so strongly with certain political views, and suffered for them with admirable constancy, he would have liked to be the cheering friend and patron of all parties. He believed himself, as he says, "one of the spirits chosen by Heaven to turn the sunny side of things to human eyes," and in his autobiography he rains an old man's blessings on every class and faction. A magazine appeared in 1834 with the title *Leigh Hunt's London Journal: To Assist the Inquiring, Animate the Struggling, and Sympathize with All.*" The journal was not a success. His ancient butt the Regent, the "fat Adonis of 50," was in no need of consolation in that matter of his corpulence, of which he was long cured. What were left of Hunt's enemies were by this too lukewarm even to be forgiven. The ungrateful metropolis refused to be so promiscuously comforted. So after a year the *London Journal* found an unexpected bond of sym-

pathy with a paper called the *Printing Machine*, and with that it amalgamated. These journals of his would never say die; if they could not amalgamate, they would hibernate, and crop up again like flowers in a kindlier season. Some one or another of them was always in bloom, spreading abroad a pleasant atmosphere of literary appreciation and tasteful judgments.

But it is to his friends that he owes his immortality, such as it is, and that sentimental occasion when he received a crown of ivy at the hands of Keats was, after all, curiously symbolic. Robed in what Carlyle called "his loose flowing muslin cloud of a printed nightgown," we find him flitting over every corner of the literary stage of his times—a ghostly figure whose personality melts away in spite of all his "autocriticisms," and leaves us face to face with his great contemporaries.

It is often said, and with some justice, that Shelley's ideal heroes are rather insipid and shadowy persons. Hunt might have stepped out of one of Shelley's minor millenniums. And Shelley was consistent—he received him with open arms. "The chirping ecstasy of the Hunt circle," the "superfluity of glib, complacent comment rubbing the bloom off the sacred beauties of art and poetry and nature,"[1] never jarred upon him as they did on Keats, partly because he was always very blind to superficiality, judging other people's effusiveness by his own; partly because, here as always, he was profoundly independent in his opinions. It was Hunt, the older and more famous man, who was influenced, not by the writing, but by the powerful personality of his "friend of friends." On Shelley's advice he undertook that voyage to Italy which was to prove so unfortunate, because "if he had recommended a balloon I should have been inclined to try it." Only too soon he found himself in a foreign land, and "utterly stranded" without his friend, business man, and patron. For Shelley had only a single afternoon to enjoy the society of his old friend, after years of separation, before he re-embarked upon that fatal voyage of which Hunt had been the innocent cause.

BYRON

Son of a penniless royalist libertine and a moneyed Presbyterian virago, the unfortunate George Gordon Byron was a hybrid—in body and mind; in life and letters. In him the Eighteenth Century and the Romantic Age met—and quarrelled. An aristocrat, a bounder, and a poet, he is the paradox on the threshold of a paradoxical century. The mass of his

[1] Sir Sidney Colvin in his *Life of Keats*.

serious verse, like an artificial Gothic ruin in a garden, is strikingly out of keeping with the real spirit of the "Romantic Revival," that great movement of which he was for so long regarded as the leading figure, but which appears in him so clearly not as one movement, but as two. Byron's triumph amounted to a serious reverse for the ideas of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge, and it was possibly through him that the true movement lost its impetus and sank into almost stagnant streams.

Yet Shelley, the completest representative of the true movement, was for many years Byron's associate and admirer, and was much influenced by him poetically. And rarely have two contemporary poets appeared to have so much in common.

They were nearly of an age; both had parents who could teach them little good, and much evil; both had physical beauty; both were aristocrats, yet of revolutionary and democratic sympathies; both were inspired to poetry by their love of Greece, yet both, at a certain stage in their careers, put politics above poetry, and aimed at a life of activity; both were deeply sensitive to the beauty of nature; both were exiled to the same beautiful country—exiled, both, because they could not endure to live in an atmosphere of public disapproval and hatred; both were hated and regarded as moral outcasts for ostensibly the same reasons—because both had left their legal wives for a mistress, and both wrote sceptically about religion and innovatingly about morals; both seemed to have very strong paternal feelings, and had to endure a separation from their children; both suffered much in life, and both died young.

Yet by later generations they have been violently opposed, one to the other; each has been regarded in turn as the chief leader of the Romantic movement: lovers of Shelley have derided Byron's poetry and exposed his morals; lovers of Byron have claimed for him power and passion and stigmatized Shelley as "utterly womanish."[1] Their views about each other were strikingly divergent. If Byron, in spite of his friends, perhaps in spite of himself, entertained a high opinion of Shelley's poetry, it was his goodness that impressed him most highly. Shelley, on the other hand, maintained the inconsistent view that Byron was a bad man and a good poet. Inconsistent, at any rate, for Shelley, for his opinion, as he expressed it in the *Defence of Poetry*, was that a poet is of necessity the wisest, happiest, and best of men. This statement he modified by admitting that "in the intervals

[1] Kingsley.

of inspiration . . . a poet becomes a man, and is abandoned to the sudden reflux of the influences under which others habitually live," and he may pursue pleasure and shun pain with too much ardour. "But," he adds, "there is nothing necessarily evil in this error, and thus cruelty, envy, revenge, avarice, and the passions purely evil, have never formed any portion of the popular imputations on the lives of poets." Yet such were the imputations made by many, and amongst them by Shelley,[1] against Byron—and no one familiar with the facts can deny that resentful, envious, and avaricious he often was.

Was it in his view of Byron's greatness, or in his conception of the poetic nature, that Shelley was wrong; and were these faults, after all, reconcilable with a powerful character and genius? "With regard to the criticism of his works," writes E. Hartley Coleridge (*Ency. Brit.*, 1911), "Byron's personality has always confused the issue." Impossible. What has confused the issue has been certain wholly imaginary qualities attributed alike to the man and to his work.

The legend of Byron's "personality" (as distinct from his reputation for a kind of satanic splendour, which was the form of the myth first prevalent in England) arose on the Continent. Matthew Arnold (for whom continental influences were often dangerous) repeats and emphasizes some of the dicta of France and Germany, notably Goethe's famous impertinence—"The English may think of Byron what they please, but it is certain that they can point to no poet who is his like. He is different from all the rest, and in the main greater." . . . "A personality such, for its eminence, as has never been yet, and such as is not likely to come again"—and brings out his own refrain about Byron's "puissant and splendid personality" over and over again. But he is compelled at the same time to make the following amazing admissions: "True, as a man, Byron could not manage himself, could not guide his ways aright, but was all astray. True, he has no light, cannot lead us from the past to the future. . . . The way out of the false state of things which enraged him he did not see . . . he had not the patience, knowledge, self-discipline, virtue, requisite for seeing it. True, also, as a poet,

[1] Shelley himself speaks of Byron as jealous, and hints clearly at avarice. In a letter to Clare, written by Mary and Shelley jointly, Mary speaks of him as revengeful and cruel. Cruel, however, he was not—not even in his treatment of Clare. He loved animals and shrank from the sight of suffering. In both these respects he had much more heart than Trelawny,

letters is as unpleasant as the yelp of a spoilt puppy snarling at shadows. In prosperity Byron might have continued a mere poseur. There was plenty of that in him as it was.

In any case, after a year Lady Byron refused to live with him, and he was profoundly stirred—and not only with resentment. "Where there is blame," he wrote to Moore, "it belongs to myself, and, if I cannot redeem, I must bear it." Unfortunately this mood soon gave place to deep indignation that he should have been judged, and on his own hearth.[1] There can be no doubt that Lady Byron was justified, and yet there is a little truth in Byron's bitter cry: "Thou hast sown in my sorrow" . . . "of thy virtues didst thou make a vice, trafficking with them in a purpose cold." She probably never guessed that a man of Byron's past might be peculiarly sensitive of the value of wedlock and fatherhood.

Her cold purpose was unassailable.[2] Byron hoped for many months that she might return to him; but he hoped in vain. The public which had puffed and caressed him, now hooted and condemned. He left England for ever, and shortly after his departure there were announced for publication *Poems by Lord Byron on his Domestic Circumstances*. Moore says that Byron wrote in his memoranda "in a manner whose sincerity there was no doubting," that these "domestic pieces" were published against his wishes by a friend who had secured a copy—a statement Moore may not have doubted, but which no sensible man would believe. Shelley used to complain that Byron would not write for posterity—he should have seen Byron's private memoranda ![3]

His earlier travels abroad had delighted him. He went abroad the second time sulky and bitter, and this supposed

[1] The indignation was long-lived. "I could have forgiven the dagger or the bowl," he writes to Moore, with characteristic noisiness and exaggeration, in September, 1818—"anything but the deliberate desolation piled upon me, when I stood alone upon my hearth, with my household gods shivered around me. . . ." (In *Marino Faliero* they become *pure* household gods that are shivered.) "Do you suppose I have forgotten it? It has comparatively swallowed up in me every other feeling, and I am only a spectator upon earth, till a tenfold opportunity occurs."

[2] "They were all surprised that Byron could have married such an iceberg" (Trelawny: *Records*, chap. v).

[3] He carefully preserved (to take one instance) a long, touching and eloquent letter to Lady Byron, written in 1821, but *never sent* because he "despaired of its doing any good." He merely showed it to Moore and sent it to a lady friend "to throw some light upon his feelings" (see Moore's *Life*, May 6, 1823). His usual references to Lady Byron have to be represented by dashes.

priest of the "Renaissance of Wonder" confessed himself "grown aged in this world of woe."

> "In deeds, not years, piercing the depths of life
> So that no wonder waits him."[1]

It was Byron in this mood that Clare Clairmont chose to pursue, and she had no one but herself to blame if she was soon thrown aside and hated. When Shelley first became acquainted with him at Geneva he was dawdling and pottering away the day, and carelessly, rapidly composing by night. But there was a smouldering fire in him, and Shelley helped to fan it into flame. In the third canto of *Childe Harold*, written at this time, there are feeling and force, however unconstructive, and passages of true poetry. But still it is a hybrid—a poem without the passionate vitality of the true romantics, and without the marble finish and deliberation and balance of the eighteenth century. Somewhere there is lacking, to heart and harp, a string.[2] The very poetry that was his sole serious occupation he pursued as he pursued his amours, with cynicism. From Venice, in 1817, he wrote to Moore "Literature is nothing. . . . I do not think it my vocation." In his Memoranda in 1821 we read: "As to inquiring what a poet *should* be, it is not worth while, for what are *they* worth, what have they done?" This recalls Shelley's youthful outburst concerning all the poets but one of ancient Greece and Rome: "What do we learn from their poets?" But Shelley was then not quite twenty, and he was engaged in misguided but enthusiastic and self-sacrificing political activities. Byron in 1817 is twenty-nine, and he is doing nothing but writing a little verse, and leading a life of the most degrading kind, about which in his endless letters he is sometimes entertainingly and sometimes tediously communicative.

This life, however, towards the close of 1818 began to mend; somehow, slowly, his ill-humour lifted. His resentment against his wife and English society seemed to have been partly appeased by the process of giving them something new to be scandalized about. That summer he wrote the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*:

> "Lo, Nemi! navell'd in the woody hills
> So far, that the uprooting wind which tears
> The oak from his foundation, and which spills
> The ocean o'er its boundary, and bears
> Its foam against the skies, reluctant spares

[1] *Childe Harold*, canto iii, st. 5.
[2] *Ibid.*, st. 4.

The oval mirror of thy glassy lake;
And calm, as cherished hate, its surface wears,
A deep, cold, settled aspect nought can shake,
All coil'd into itself and round, as sleeps the snake."

He is still pursuing, this time successfully, the romantic style; but in his letters he decries it, and clamours for the glories of Pope. When Shelley visits him in August, 1818, he finds him living badly still, but "changed into the liveliest and happiest-looking man I ever met." He has begun *Don Juan*.[1] In April, 1819, he has what developed into probably his only real affair of the heart. That year he begins to take an active part in the Italian movement for liberation.

Yet when the political schemes came to nothing, and he accompanied the exiled family of his mistress to Pisa in 1821, he relapsed, for a time at least, not into debauchery, but into his old lounging, pottering, gossiping existence, and with his old ill-humour at his elbow. "He passed each day," says Trelawny,[2] by rising "after noon, dawdling about until two or three, following the same road on horseback, stopping at the same Podere, firing his popguns and retracing his steps at the same slow pace; his frugal dinner followed by his accustomed visit to an Italian family, and then—the midnight lamp and the immortal verses." Immortal verses, yes, sometimes—but what a life to be deliberately chosen by a man who had all the resources of health, wealth, liberty and intellect to enrich his own spirit and the world with! His talk, according to Trelawny, was mainly of "actors, boxers, gamblers, duellers, drunkards . . . deaths, elopements, marriages, scandal." He read little. Though he greatly admired, and was admired by, Goethe, he received tributes of praise from him he could not read, because he would not make the effort to learn German. "Friendship," he wrote, "is a propensity in which my genius is very limited." His letters, in spite of their energetic style, and a certain abrupt expressiveness at first attractive, pall simply because they are violent rather than ardent, and often so unconvincing. He talks about Literature in them at length, but in a way that seems academic, and from a purely intellectual standpoint; as for the objects of his amours,

[1] A mistake is usually made about the date when Byron wrote the first canto of *Don Juan*: Nichol makes it November; E.H.C. (E. H. Coleridge), in the *Ency. Brit.*, says September; Shelley's letter to Peacock of October 8 is however final. He speaks of his visit to Byron at the end of August, and says: "He read me the first canto of his *Don Juan*."

[2] Shelley's account (and Medwin's) of his manner of life agree very closely with Trelawny's.

he describes them as if they were the mannequins in a draper's shop He is vivid about his colics, and his possets, and his enemies, and sometimes about the natural world; and there are rare outbursts of feeling—but very rare. And the amazing discrepancy between the feelings expressed to different correspondents, or between the expression of feelings and the exhibition of them in life, makes one coldly critical of all.[1] Sometimes his letters are positively old-mannish. The death of a sergeant who was wounded in the street and brought into Byron's house to die, he relates at great length three times over, and twice on the same day, in almost the same words. Every little joke he deems himself to have made, every trifling epigram or jingle, is transcribed for each separate correspondent—(and now included in his collected works!)

Even *Don Juan*, when he was once embarked upon it, became something of a habit: he went on and on, canto after canto, embroidering a single theme, and clinging all the time to his perverse views of poetry, "fit," as Shelley said, "for the production of mediocrity." His dislike of Shakespeare, which Mary Shelley (according to Trelawny in the *Records*) believed to be jealousy, and which Swinburne attributed to the same ludicrous cause, was at least as much due to his utter incapacity for understanding anything on so great a scale. The rags he left himself of his religious upbringing encumbered him to the end, but had never clothed him. Shelley's *loss* seems to have affected him but little;[2] the sight of his sodden body roused his superstition and his fears of death and the Judgment.

He shows in all these things the mind and habits of a man who lives slowly, and in a narrow orbit—looking back oftener than forward—looking inwards most of all.

About a year after Shelley's death he was stirred out of his daily round and his gloom by the proposal that he should embark for Greece to aid the revolution He hesitated a great deal, and finally went. Either from his own incapacity, as Trelawny would have us believe (which is a reason for not believing it in this case, as Trelawny wanted by contrast to magnify his own deeds), or from that of the Greeks, he accomplished nothing. He fell ill and died, at the age of thirty-six

[1] Macaulay frankly abandons the effort to separate the real and the affected Byron. "How far the character in which he exhibited himself was genuine, and how far theatrical, it would probably have puzzled himself to say."

[2] Medwin says, however, that Byron did grieve and knew he had lost his one true and disinterested friend.

All Europe was in dismay. England, who had lost in the preceding three years both Keats and Shelley with little more than a shrug, was shaken by the death of Byron, and as Macaulay tells us: "rigid moralists could not refrain from weeping . . .,"[1] while one of his former mistresses, a lady in high society in London, coming suddenly upon his funeral procession, shrieked, fainted, and rapidly went out of her mind. But Byron had been tired of the very memory of her long ago. As for England, he had left, in a will of a few years previously, to his natural daughter whom he protested he dearly loved, but who predeceased him in the solitude of an unwholesome convent, a small sum of money on the condition that she did not marry an Englishman.

Gradually the laments subsided, the scandalmongers revived again, and the brightest flame of Byron's reputation passed over on to the Continent.

Byron's life, though fortunately, in all probability, a good deal less unhappy than it was painted, was clearly not a success—a fact that has been attributed to many things; to his mother, who was doubtless responsible for much (but he had an excellent nurse and was early sent to school, so that he soon detached himself from her, and he frankly showed almost as a boy that he disliked her); to his falling in love at sixteen with Mary Chaworth, who married another; to his committing incest with his half-sister; to his being spurned by his wife in consequence. But none of these things—whether true or not—are the real secret. When he fell in love with Mary Chaworth it was unfortunately not the first occasion; he had fallen in love once for all before that—with himself.

There is a kind of selfishness that is a defect like other defects; there is another kind which implies a narrow state of being, and is rooted, not in the character, but in the very life. Byron's selfishness was of this latter sort; it was irreconcilable with the highest creative work; it bred in him self-consciousness, laziness, envy, insincerity—all the faults which, as Shelley rightly implied, a poet dare not harbour. "A poet must have 'self-concentration'—selfishness perhaps," wrote Keats to Shelley; but only such selfishness, indeed, as springs from absorption in his own ideas. In Shelley's life, and all its errors, we see a man struggling desperately to express and realize his ideas; in Byron's we see the disintegration of a man who has practically none. And hence, in spite of his energy and his intense interest in himself and his feelings, he has no lyrical

[1] Tennyson, it is interesting to remember, was much affected, when as a boy of fifteen he heard of Byron's death.

cry—because a great lyric is never on a purely personal note. Only on those rare occasions when Byron turns his poetry outward do we get a moving poem. There is a monotony of tone, and a spiritual uninventiveness over all his vast and apparently varied canvas. He claimed to be a writer of passion, but as Swinburne says it is not enough for a writer "to protest that his characters are bursting and burning with passion; they must do something to second him—to make us feel and see that they are." Byron in fact mistook rhetoric and resentment for poetry and fire; and "cynical twaddle is none the less twaddle because of its cynicism." He believed himself to be a *man* of passion, but as his friend, Lady Blessington, put it, "he mistakes temper for character."[1] Some at least of those who associated with him were aware of the large tracts of pure dullness in his character.[2] But the rest of the world, in search of poisonous berries and dead men's bones, long scoured his deserts without ever perceiving that they were sand.[3] The life he led was not merely disgraceful, but—and for his poetry, that was even worse—*disgruntled.* His adventures left him jaded, surly and gloomy. Even his truest sorrows did not bleed honestly, but became as morbid growths swelling his inward egoism. Experience did not add one cubit to his stature; experience was merely a thing that rankled in him—the worm, the canker, and the grief.[4] He could not struggle for faith, nor build up ideals, nor hope till hope creates, and *will* least of all. His life is thus in violent contrast to Shelley's, which it seemed so curiously to resemble.

The relation between the two men was altogether a very strange one. Shelley was every now and again fascinated by Byron's intellectual force, though not for long; he was always

[1] "Lord B[illegible] [illegible]rative," was Keats' ve[illegible]

[2] [illegible] See also Trelawny.

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[1] "Lord Byron cuts a figure, but he is not figurative," was Keats' version. See Letter, February, 1819.

[2] See Shelley's letter to Gisborne of June 18, 1822. See also Trelawny.

[3] Macaulay, however, who at the beginning of his essay supports the view that Byron was a great tragic figure, belies himself at the end and writes: "There can be no doubt that this remarkable man owed the vast influence which he exercised over his contemporaries at least as much to his gloomy egotism as to the real power of his poetry. We never could very clearly understand how it is that [illegible]

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deeply impressed by his best work, though widely differing in his poetical opinions. For Byron was but half-heartedly a poet, and composed at least as much from vanity as from ambition. Shelley, though so modest, was boundlessly ambitious, and tried in vain to urge Byron to higher flights.[1] Of these flights he believed him capable, because he really overrated the constructive side in Byron. Seeing him "in opposition," an iconoclast and a scorner of society, he long believed him to be also a creator, and a lover of mankind like himself. Shelley's intellect was far the keener, and his culture much deeper. Though both drew their inspiration so largely from Greece, Byron's scholarship was but very shallow, and he preferred Pope's *Iliad* to Homer's. Though both were aristocrats and revolutionaries, only Shelley was a gentleman as well; in a sense only Shelley was genuinely democratic.[2] They affected both to be at war with the false opinions of society, but Byron was afraid of the opinion he wished to flout; and he knew well that Shelley feared nothing. And so it came about that while Shelley supposed himself overshadowed by Byron's greatness, Byron was really, unwillingly, half-unconsciously, at his feet.

"I was . . . pleased," Trelawny says, "and surprised at Byron's passiveness and docility in listening to Shelley. . . . Byron knew him to be exempt from the egotism, pedantry, coxcombry, and, more than all, the rivalry of authorship, and that he was the truest and most discriminating of his admirers." . . . "During the time I knew Byron, he never talked seriously and confidentially with any person but Shelley." He even sought his help in his private affairs, and matters of his own conduct.[3]

"Lord Byron had certainly a profound respect for Shelley's judgment," writes Medwin. "I have mentioned[4] being present when the MS. of *The Deformed Transformed* was placed in his hands, and Shelley's remark after perusing it: 'that he liked it the least of all his works; that it smelt too strongly of *Faust*; and besides, that there were two lines in it, word for

[1] See particularly the new letters in *Lord Byron's Correspondence*, Ed. by Mr. John Murray.

[2] Byron was very fond of his cut-throat gang of faithful Italian servants; but they were part of his menagerie like the dogs and birds and monkeys he ruled and scolded.

[3] "I have the greatest trouble to get away; and L.B., as a reason for my stay, has urged that without either me or the Guiccioli, he will certainly fall into his old habits. I then talk, and he listens to reason. . . ." (*Shelley to Mary*, August, 1821.)

[4] In *The Conversations of Lord Byron.*

word, from Southey.' On which occasion Byron turned deadly pale, seized the MS. and committed it to the flames . . ."[1] Of the first meeting between Byron and Shelley at Geneva, ... ation of Mr. Shelley, from the ... tic speculations ... was of a nature strongly to arrest and ... of Lord Byron, and to turn him away from worldly associations and topics into more abstract and untrodden ways of thought." In a letter urging Trelawny to come to Pisa and meet Shelley, Williams says: "Lord Byron and others think him by far the most imaginative poet of the day.[2] The style of his lordship's letters to him is quite that of a pupil, such as asking his opinion, and demanding his advice . . . etc."

"Shelley is to my knowledge," wrote Byron some months before his friend's death, "the *least* selfish and the mildest of men—a man who has made more sacrifices of his fortune and feelings for others than any I ever heard of." And again, after his death: "You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley, who was, without exception, the *best* and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison."

But it was typical of Byron's weakness that he could feel like this, and yet could not be consistently nice even to Shelley. Thus the connexion between the "personality" and the ... of happiness to the latter, and the gulf ... "Certain it is," Shelley ... has made me bitterly feel the inferiority which the world has presumed to place between us and which subsists nowhere in reality but in our talents, which are not our own but Nature's; or in our rank, which is not our own but Fortune's."

Byron acquiesced in—and even encouraged—the grossest slanders against Shelley.[4] The absurd little incident about

[1] "It was destined to rise again from its ashes," Medwin goes on. "Poets, like mothers, have a strange fondness for their ricketty offspring." This anecdote may, of course, be rather worked up, but there is doubtless a basis of truth

[2] Medwin gives a similar opinion from Byron in his *Conversations.*

[3] See Shelley's letter to Clare, May 31, 1822.

[4] ... ssed a ... (For *Correspondence.*) ... *Byron's*

the latter's boat[1] shows how little he could control his vanity and temper even in dealings with this "*best* of men." On the last day of his life Shelley was deeply distressed by Byron's reception of Hunt, and when Trelawny met him on his way to the doomed vessel, he "was in mournful mood; his mind depressed by a recent interview with Byron." So little did Byron honour the memory of their long friendship, that when Hunt with his sick wife and large family was left, as Byron himself said, "totally aground" by Shelley's death, Byron's attempts at rescue were of the feeblest and meanest. While to Mary Shelley, left infinitely more stranded, and in difficulties for money, he offered it with "such an air of unwillingness and sense of the obligation he conferred" that she chose rather to accept it from the generous but limited pocket of the Pirate (Trelawny).

For all that, Byron was probably, on the whole, of more use to Shelley, than he to Byron. Shelley drew material, and if not inspiration, *impulse* from his friend's works. But Byron partly knew that Shelley—so slow to judge—judged him,[2] and could not quite forgive it; and partly perhaps was jealous of a happiness and faith he could not share, and would not wholly trust. "The ideal," he said to Trelawny, "has no effect on the real character." It was not through Shelley that Byron was saved.

But saved he was; and by two qualities, one of which he and Shelley had in common, while in the other Shelley was grievously wanting.

From these two, springs all that is best in Byron's life and works—so far is personality from being divorced from poetry.

[1] It was first intended to be called the *Don Juan* and to be owned jointly by Trelawny and Shelley. When Trelawny dropped out of the plan, Shelley decided to call his boat the *Ariel*, but Byron "took fire at this" (says Mary) and had the name *Don Juan* indelibly stamped on the sails. But Shelley was not to be bullied. He put a new reef in.

[2] Shelley early saw through his Satanic pose. He says of *Childe Harold* (Letter to Peacock, December, 1818): "The spirit in which it is written is, if insane, the most wicked and mischievous insanity that ever was given forth. . . . I remonstrated with him in vain on the tone of mind from which such a view of things alone arises. real root is very different from its apparent one. Nothing ca sublime than the true source of these expressions of conter desperation. The fact is,"—and here follows an account of By in Venice. Yet Shelley was so tactful and gentle in his dealir Byron could write, though in the very act of admitting that he no real friendship for Shelley: "Of all men Shelley thought of my talents—and, perhaps, of my disposition." (Letter o 1823.)

His sense of humour and his hatred of oppression united to produce their legitimate offspring, *satire*. In *Don Juan* and in all his political activities, Byron rose as from the dead.

Very soon after he first went to Venice he began to feel compassion for the state of Italy, and for the downtrodden Venetians with whom he associated, disgracefully it is true, but as one of themselves. He had only just begun *Don Juan* when he met the Countess Guiccioli, a simple, intelligent young Italian, who with an extraordinary sincerity and unselfishness devoted herself to Byron. After a time she achieved a separation from her husband, and although she did not live in Byron's house, she was in the position of a wife to him, and kept him faithful to her as no one had ever done before. This may have been at least partly due to her connexion, through her own political interests, and her revolutionary brother and father, with all that Byron felt to be best in himself. It was through the Gambas, father and son, that he began actively to support the Italian cause.

That romantic spirit, which was Shelley's main inspiration, was not for Byron. But a comparatively unselfish human affection, and some real human service, a better way of living, and a better state of temper, enabled the eighteenth century spirit, the spirit of satire, to descend upon him, but not in its eighteenth century form. The influence of the age to which Byron actually belonged gave even satire wings, and so made a Byron of a Pope.

Don Juan is a work all Byron's own: alive with his life; neither beyond the scope of his personality, nor unworthy of all that was original and vigorous in it. It is the only true child of his genius. Such sympathy as he had with humanity, what joy he had in nature, his picturesque eighteenth century [illegible]

to feelings his egoism eternally denied him, and to a quality of soul not even his most genuine sorrows had made deep.

The racy, good-humoured impropriety of *Don Juan* had, as Shelley remarked,[1] "an analogy with the general system of his character, and the wit and poetry which surround hide with their light the darkness of the thing itself. They contradict it even." Byron believed in nothing, said Trelawny, but his earlier disbelief in man and life had led to mere inhumanly

[1] Of Byron's method in general (see letter to Mrs. Hunt, November 11, 1820), but he was almost certainly thinking of *Don Juan*.

gloomy rhyming, and unhuman conduct. In *Don Juan* his very disbelief has a certain human charm.

> "Oh man! thou feeble tenant of an hour,
> Debased by slavery, or corrupt by power,
> Who knows thee well must quit thee with disgust,
> Degraded mass of animated dust."[1]

This was his early style. What a contrast to the jovial desperation of his later poem:

> "What are the hopes of man? Old Egypt's King
> Cheops erected the first pyramid,
> And largest, thinking it was just the thing
> To keep his memory whole, and mummy hid;
> But somebody or other, rummaging,
> Burglariously broke his coffin's lid;
> Let not a monument give you or me hopes
> Since not a pinch of dust remains of Cheops."

From being affected, he has become effective.

And it was not only in *Don Juan* that Byron had learned to be himself. He honestly loved La Guiccioli. But he seems to have harboured no exaggerated sentiments about his feelings for her (whatever he may have said in his love letters). Early in their acquaintance he wrote to Moore: "I greatly fear that the Guiccioli is going into a consumption, to which her constitution tends. Thus it is with everything and everybody for whom I feel anything like a real attachment . . . I never even could keep alive a dog that I liked or that liked me." "Et j'ai déjà perdu mon perroquet ce matin," cried Heine's wife when he really did go into a consumption, fatally. La Guiccioli recovered, and broke the spell that brooded over Byron's dear gazelles.

"Lord Byron is greatly improved in every respect, in genius, in temper, in moral views, in health, in happiness. The connexion with La Guiccioli has been an inestimable benefit to him. The interest which he took in the politics of Italy, and the actions he performed in consequence of it, are subjects . . . such as will delight and surprise you."[2] This was Shelley's impression when he visited Byron at Ravenna in August, 1821. But on the subject of poetry he records that "we . . . as usual differed, and I think more than ever."[3]

"If one's years can't be better employed than in sweating poesy a man had better be a ditcher." That was really

[1] On a Newfoundland Dog, *c.* 1809.
[2] To Mary, August 9, 1821.
[3] *Ibid.*, August 7, 1821.

Byron's view—and a good wholesome view in its way for a man who could never have attained the highest in poetry, but who had physical courage and athletic ambitions and could swim the Hellespont. Even while employing his years far worse than any ditcher, he admired, and longed through the stupor of his egoism to realize, a life of activity. *Don Juan* with its flippant brilliancy and cynical outlook, though the best that he could do in poetry, was not enough to satisfy that measure of idealism which had been meted even to Byron. By his one genuine unselfish feeling, he at last attained it. For the Italian Carbonari, of whom he was a member, he risked his life and spent his money with a fervour he had shown in nothing else. Here was his poetry and his ideal. "Only think—a free Italy!!! It is . . . the very *poetry* of politics."[1]

If Italy raised her politics to the height of poetry, and won Byron to generosity and ardour, Greece had an even greater call for him. "If I have ever written a line worth preserving," said he to Trelawny, "it was Greece that inspired it." Greece did still more for him when she gave him the opportunity of rising out of himself, out of his cynical and petty life, up to the level of brave hope and heroic action, whither he had gazed. In dreaming of Marathon, in drilling at Missolonghi, Byron was at his best:

"The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece
Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the arts of war and peace,
Where Delos rose and Phœbus sprung!
Eternal Summer gilds them yet,
But all, except their sun is set.

. . . .

"The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea;
And musing there an hour alone
I dream'd that Greece might still be free;
For standing on the Persians' grave
I could not deem myself a slave"

"He wrote f[illegible] Swinburne, in this confirming [illegible] wrote of Politics" He had

[1] A sentiment the Italian movement was again to arouse; see Nino Bixio's letter to his wife in May, 1859, "Sono nella poesia." (Quoted in Trevelyan's *Garibaldi and the Thousand*, chap v.)

CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHERS AND FRIENDS (*continued*)

THOMAS MEDWIN

FROM the paradox of Byron it is refreshing to turn to the oxymoron that was Thomas Medwin, and to that monument of devotion, slovenliness, slyness, and perspicacity—his *Life of Shelley.* It is generally supposed that Medwin had no sense; but certainly, if he was a fool, there was a decided point about his folly. And not the least pointed is the extreme brevity of all that we know about his life. Of Byron we know only too much; of Medwin we know so exquisitely little that from soon after the year 1824 when he had the sharpness to marry an heiress, spend her money, and run away, till about forty years later when he is said to have died, he was almost, according to a notice in the *Westminster Review,* "never seen or heard of again." Heard he was, however, if not heard of, for he appeared in print with great regularity, now with a poem or novel, now with a translation from Æschylus, now with a memoir.

"It may not be irrelevant to mention," says Medwin, near the beginning of his *Life of Shelley,* "that Miss Michell, Sir Bysshe's[1] first wife, was my grandfather's first cousin; and that my mother bore the same degree of consanguinity to Miss Pilfold[2]; their fathers being brothers; which circumstances I mention in order to account for the intimacy of our families, and mine with Bysshe, as he was always called."

The intimacy existed apparently, but when Shelley was eleven years old: "Mama depends upon your bringing Tom over to-morrow, and if you don't we shall be very much disappointed," Shelley writes to an aunt in 1803. But in 1820, shortly after Medwin had arrived to stay with him at Pisa, he says: "Medwin is very agreeable—I do not know him well enough to say that he is amiable." Certainly most

[1] Sir Bysshe was Shelley's grandfather.
[2] Miss Pilfold became Shelley's mother.

of Medwin's claim to intimacy with Shelley in his youth is hardly justified. Medwin was at Sion House Preparatory School for a few years with Shelley. He left it for a different public school. He left Oxford before Shelley went there. He claims to have collaborated in Shelley's juvenile production, *The Wandering Jew.* Shortly after this he went off to India as a Lieutenant in the Light Dragoons. Almost the next thing we know of him he is living on half-pay at Geneva in 1820 with his friends the Williamses. From thence he goes to stay with the Shelleys at Pisa. Soon after, Shelley writes, "Medwin's cheerful conversation is of some use to me." But it did not escape the usual fate of cheerful conversation! "You have no idea," writes Mary presently, "how earnestly we desire the transfer of Medwin to Florence. In plain Italian he is a *seccatura.* He sits with us, and be one reading or writing, he insists upon interrupting one every moment to read all the fine things he either writes or reads. Besides writing poetry he translates. He intends, he says, to translate all the fine passages of Dante."

Soon Medwin enticed the Williamses to Pisa. "We see the Williams's constantly," Shelley writes in the summer of 1821, "nice good-natured people, very soft society after authors and pretenders to philosophy." Medwin's transfer has in fact been achieved, but in the same letter Shelley says, "Medwin is going to be married to a daughter of Sir E. Dalbyn, only fifteen years old. He is in full chase to Venice." But no; the young lady in question was either not rich enough for the sharper in Medwin, or too wise for the fool. In November, 1821, he is back in Pisa again. In November, 1822, Trelawny writes to Clare: "Sir Jn. St. Aubyn and Medwin have been there [in Paris] some time; the latter is married, I am told, to Mrs. Pain." But he wasn't. In 1825 Medwin married Anne Henrietta, Baroness Hamilton of Sweden, an heiress, and by her he had two daughters, and fell deeply into debt. "I hear Medwin is a great man at Florence," writes Mary Shelley in 1824, "so Pisa and economy are at an end." The *London Gazette* in February, 1831, testifies to the triumph of Medwin's cunning, but present or past follies caused the triumph to be very brief.[1] On February 1, we read of the promotion of Lieut. Thomas Medwin from half-pay in the Light Dragoons to full-pay as a Lieutenant in the Life Guards; but on February 15 we read of his retirement. "Did you hear," Mary writes to Trelawny, "that Medwin contrived to get himself gazetted

[1] The extracts from the *London Gazette* appear in Mr. H. Forman's edition of Medwin's *Revised Life of Shelley.*

for full-pay in the Guards? I fancy he employed his connection with the Shelleys, who are connected with the King through the FitzClarences. However, a week after he was gazetted as retiring. I suppose the officers cut him at mess; his poor wife and children! how I pity them!" It was probably soon after this that Medwin "ran away."

In 1845 he was in Germany, working at his *Life of Shelley*. In 1835, he had published *The Angler in Wales*, a hotch-potch containing several anecdotes of Byron and Shelley. But this was *not* a labour of love. "O God," he concludes an irritable letter to his publisher, "how sick I am of *The Angler in Wales*." The *Life*, on the other hand, was intended partly at least as a tribute to Shelley, and was a much more serious—and likely to be a more lucrative—undertaking. He wrote to Mary for material, and when she deprecated the publication at that time of certain facts about Shelley's life,[1] he seems to have attempted to blackmail her. But Mary was "quite hardened" against an "attempt to extort money." Medwin published his book in 1847, and probably it somewhat retrieved his fortunes. But in 1858 Trelawny writes: "Medwin I have not seen for years; he is loafing about as usual seeking whom he may devour." He wound up his literary career in 1862 with a publication entitled *Odds and Ends*.

In 1869 he seems to have died. "Medwin died this year, at the age of 82 or 3," writes Trelawny to Clare. But six years later, in 1875, Trelawny writes to Clare: "Medwin has been dead two years; you must remember him." Certainly Trelawny had done his best to make Clare remember that Medwin was *dead*, though *when* might be a mystery, for in 1871 he wrote to her: "Medwin died at the end of last year."

That is the whole of the life of Thomas Medwin; but of his *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* there is more to be said. That Medwin was a "perfect idiot" was the opinion of a gentleman who associated with him in Pisa. That he was "more of a sharper than an idiot" is the opinion of the editor of his *Life of Shelley*. Variations upon these two compliments have been Medwin's portion all along—and both are true. But between Medwin's folly and his knavery there dwelt a certain real worth and talent—and *that*, if recognized by no one else, was recognized by Shelley. It is not merely that Shelley nursed

[1] She mentions especially the account of the Chancery suit, which would injure Shelley's daughter Ianthe (owing to revelations about Harriet). Medwin eventually made his revelations by implication rather than by direct statements.

him when he was ill, taught him, read to him, counselled him, and gave him money. As Medwin himself says, Shelley was not merely kind to others from a strict regard to right and justice, "but, where no such claims existed," could exercise, "to his own detriment, an active and unwearied benevolence." And we know that Shelley found Medwin something of a bore. But Shelley did more than these acts of kindness for him. He criticized his work with care, and actually *rewrote* portions of his verses for him. "I will enclose your *Pindarees* by the next post, with . . . such corrections, since you ask me for them, as I can best make. But remember, I will not vouch for their not being much inferior to the passages they supplant."[1] Even if we can attribute this wholly to Shelley's unexampled courtesy and generosity, we cannot so explain the fact that, from the renewal of their acquaintance in 1820, he showed Medwin in print or MS. almost everything he wrote, and took serious note of his opinions. "I am delighted with your approbation of my *Cenci*, and am encouraged to wish to present you with *Prometheus Unbound*," he writes in July, 1820, and a year later: "I am happy to hear that *Adonais* pleased you . . . I think I shall write again. Whilst you were with me, that is during the latter period, and after you went away, I was harassed by some severe disquietudes, the causes of which are now, I hope, almost at an end."[2] He corresponded and talked with him at some length about literature, as with a man who has a serious literary future

...nkly of his own ambitions and

of April 16, 1820, he writes:

...be a poet by dint of stinting himself of meat and drink to pay his printer's bill—that is, he can only print poems on this condition. But there is every reason to hope better things for you." Shelley, as was his way, was generously and absurdly overrating Medwin's powers, but he was misled, perhaps, by Medwin's deep and earnest love for literature. It was this love for literature that has made Medwin in one sense the best of all Shelley's biogra...

...the value of literature to the world, and of the reverence due to genius—apart from all other characteristics of the men

[1] April 16, 1820.

[2] August, 1821. This last sentence, of course, is Shelley's way of reassuring Medwin about his visit, and excusing himself to his own conscience for having felt him a bore.

endowed with it. A Lieutenant of Dragoons on service in India is not often given to loving music,[1] writing tolerable poems, and studying the classics with fervour. It was Medwin's love of literature that led him, when he picked up the *Revolt of Islam* on an Indian bookstall, to seek out Shelley, after more than ten years had elapsed since their last meeting. He drew after him to Pisa, Williams, destined to be one of Shelley's dearest companions, and Jane Williams, who inspired some of his sweetest poems; and Trelawny himself, who might boast of always disliking Medwin, but owed to him the one lasting enthusiasm of his own life, and the existence of those *Records* which have given him immortality.

Medwin's *Life of Shelley* contains blunders and idiocies almost beyond belief; but it contains as well some very sane and even searching judgments. His faculty for remembering at least the general trend of Shelley's literary conversations depended quite as much upon his own keenness for the subject as on his love for the man. In making notes of Byron's conversations from day to day he may have known that he was laying up material for a profitable work; but there was, in 1820, no demand for records of Shelley's, and he was not so given to talking about his deepest interests and feelings. Medwin won him to do so partly by genuine affection and real sympathy with his sufferings and isolation,[2] and partly by a great interest in his works, and in such a writer as Æschylus. Æschylus was a passion with Medwin, and he made translations of six of his plays. The translations are very free and very bad, for Medwin had an utterly slovenly mind, but his knowledge of classics certainly helped him to appreciate Shelley. He saw, for instance, that it was a study of the classics that was at least one instrument in saving him from the effete influences of Hunt.

Occasionally Medwin's criticisms were worth the consideration that his cousin apparently gave them.[3] Medwin even seems to have had the insight to understand why the drama on *Charles the First* was a nut that Shelley could never have cracked.[4] All his principles necessarily placed him in opposition to Charles as a ruler, but, as Medwin says, he "could not reconcile his mind to the beheading of Charles," because, for

[1] See references to music in *Medwin's Life, passim.*

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one thing, he did not believe in capital punishment. Moreover, "much less could he make a hero of . . . Cromwell. . . . He hated the Puritans—not their tenets so much as their intolerance. He abominated the atrocities which, on the plea of religion, were perpetrated on the devoted Irish Catholics."

Even Shelley's mastery of technique did not always escape the man who could make sheer gibberish in quotation of his noblest lines; who could suppose that the poem beginning "Unfathomable sea" was addressed to the ocean, and that the line from the poem, *The Magnetic Lady to her Patient*, "What would cure me, that would kill me, Jane," had reference to the dangerous and unpleasant process of removing a gall-stone. Yet of the odes to Liberty and to Naples, Medwin writes: "They have the merit of being—what few or none of our modern odes (miscalled) are—odes constructed on the models left us by Pindar and Horace . . . and have only one fault, that, alas! they were not prophetic." He recognized, in fact, that Shelley could accomplish that rare feat, he could write an English ode.

Medwin was one of the few to notice the beauty of Peacock's rarely read poem, *Rhododaphne*. He was early an admirer of [illegible]

of Shelley his own sincerity has decidedly the better of his shiftiness.

Medwin has none of the qualifications of a good biographer—so declares his editor. But Sir H. Buxton Forman, whose edition is amazingly inadequate and hasty, might, we feel, in the very phrase which he aimed at another, "have been better employed in investigating important statements of Medwin's than in hunting up cheap gibes to sling at him." Was the love of literature and that love of Shelley, in which Trelawny says Medwin was ever honest and consistent, no qualification? To Forman, Medwin's affection is only "parasitical" and "a determination to hang on to Shelley's coat-tails." Doubtless Medwin echoed Shelley and plagiarized a little. But so did they all. Plainly he did not think it irrelevant to mention an intimacy of boyhood that did not exist, and in

[1] *Revised Life of Shelley*, p. 438. "Many a time . . . in read' the poems of Byron, I have been led to regard with equal suspi - the value and sincerity of those opinions."

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Medwin was one of the few to notice the beauty of Peacock's rarely read poem, *Rhododaphne*. He was early an admirer of Keats, and could distinguish between his passionate earnestness, however strained his language, and Byron's audacious affectations.[1] In Shelley he fully recognized "that sincerity of soul that shines through all his writings"; and when he is writing of Shelley his own sincerity has decidedly the better of his shiftiness.

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his desire to connect himself in any way with his adored he represented himself as having been present on an occasion when he was absent. His disappointment at not having really witnessed the burning of Shelley's body led him in his *Conversations of Lord Byron* to a considerable commission of the lie indirect. But he told the bitter truth in his *Life of Shelley*, and need now, therefore, only plead guilty to being one in the crowd of friends, critics, and biographers of Shelley who, from Mary and Hunt, wrangling over the heart which Trelawny, the melodramatic, claimed to have snatched from the flames, down through W. M. Rossetti, who could exclaim, "Trelawny has a piece of Shelley's jawbone—charred of course—which he showed me. Oh that it were mine one day!"[1] right down to Mr. Harry Buxton Forman, who finds time to vulgarize at some length over the pyre,[2] have all disfigured and disgraced the sad and simple act of disposing of Shelley's already mouldering remains according to the quarantine laws of Italy. But in one respect it would have been an advantage if Medwin had had rather more to do with Shelley's obsequies; for he alone seems to have recognized that the lines from the *Tempest* which Trelawny prided himself on having engraved upon Shelley's tomb were "very inapplicable, for they allude to one drowned and *lost* at sea." They were utterly, even offensively, inappropriate, for more reasons than this, as Medwin seems to have recognized, for he suggests instead some lines from *Lycidas*, which he typically misquotes, but which pleased him because they speak not of transformation but of resurrection.

No; Medwin was a fool, and a knave, but he was something more; and with sincere feeling, and not without justification in what he claims for himself, he concludes his Preface to his *Life of Shelley* in these words: "How painfully interesting is his life! with so many weaknesses—with so much to pardon—so much to pity—so much to admire—so much to love—there is no romance, however stirring, that in other hands might not have paled before it. Such as it is, I throw it on the indulgence of his friends and the public. It has been written with no indecorous haste[3]—by one sensible of the difficulty of the task—of his inadequacy to do it justice—of his unworthiness to touch the hem of Shelley's garment, but not by one unable to appreciate the greatness of his genius, or to estimate the qualities of his heart."

[1] See *Letters about Shelley*, W.M.R. to Garnett.
[2] See Forman's Introduction to *Trelawny's Letters*, and elsewhere.
[3] Medwin's amazing muddles and mistakes probably did not spring from haste, but from the constitution of the man's mind.

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

Peacock, the scornful, posturing, brilliant, many-coloured Peacock, the classic Peacock; the eclectic, worldly-wise, mocking, mimicking, and yet romantic Peacock, was the aristocrat among those motley creatures that surrounded our Orpheus. But he was perhaps the deafest of them all to the poet's song, and the least enthralled by his charms. "The style," said Landor, in a letter to Mary Shelley, "is a part of the mind, just as feathers are part of the bird." The style of Peacock is a rippling surface of a thousand colours, refracting the light of heaven at the most startling and unexpected angles. Iridescence was life to him; had he pledged himself to *any abiding* hue, he would have become as drab as any barnyard fowl.

But he had traits which, at a first glance, might seem to mark him out as the most suitable partner in Shelley's friendship. He was liberal in his politics, cultured, imaginative; he tempered romance with classicism, and added gentlemanliness to genius. He had a generous joy of life, and took immense pleasure in all natural beauty. He was free in spirit, kind, and honourable and wise. Yet somehow the friendship between himself and Shelley was a failure, and he made nothing out of his great opportunity but a short and rather curt memoir, a laughing parody, and a considerable perquisite. The communicativeness of Shelley's friends seems to vary in inverse ratio to their financial indebtedness—a fact which might be regarded suspiciously by the suspicious. Godwin engulfed much, and said nothing. Hunt made a good meal, and said a short grace. Byron and Peacock took each his £1,000, and Peacock his annuity, Byron morosely, and Peacock with more brevity than usual, and less wit; while, as Trelawny says, himself and Hogg (and in another place he seems to include Medwin), his chief historians, were among the few honest friends who "loved and did not rob him." Peacock did not exactly rob Shelley—he served him patiently and well as business-man; but when he was earning an income of £1,800 at the India Office, he does not seem to have remembered that the poet had for some time subscribed £100 a year to his support. This oversight, however, would certainly not have cooled the feelings of Shelley; while, on Peacock's side, even his refined epicureanism might have been willing to endure the discomforts of intercourse with a man who fed mainly on bread and raisins, and who, as Hogg laments so bitterly, did not even have puddings for dinner.

Their friendship began on the whole with promise. Peacock's first publications showed not the ghost of a smile, and though they also showed barely the shadow of his coming literary power, Shelley was delighted with their combination of sentiment and scholarship, and deceived into finding real beauty in the graceful verse. He was enthusiastic about everything but the unknown author's opinions, and these he regarded with suspicion, for in *The Genius of the Thames* commerce had been mentioned with approval, and George III with praise!

But a fortunate circumstance dispelled all further doubts, for when Shelley visited Wales in 1812, when Peacock was still practically a stranger to him, the following incident occurred, as Shelley relates in a letter: "I was speaking of Mr. Peacock to a lady who knew him during his residence in Wales. . . . 'Oh,' she said, 'Mr. Peacock lived in a cottage near Tan-y-bwlch, associating with no one, and hiding his head, like a murderer, but,' she added, altering her voice to a tone of appropriate gravity, 'he was *worse than that*, he was an atheist!'" After this, could Shelley hesitate to open his heart and his home to Peacock? In 1813, Peacock became his guest at Bracknell. The visit was full of profit to them both —to Peacock it was perhaps momentous. For it seems very likely that in the extraordinary atmosphere of Madame de Boinville's whimsical, revolutionary, æsthetic, crotchety, gushing, and moonstruck household, the irrestrainable bud of humour germinated in Peacock's soul. He even laughed a little there and then, and made Harriet Shelley laugh too. Shelley forgave him, and though he tended to complain of his coldness on this occasion, his wide learning and sound common sense was a grateful and wholesome antidote to even the most fascinating of female faddists. Peacock's immense love for the ancient world found a response in Shelley, and kindled him to wider and deeper study; while his natural habit of free and independent thought made him at least appear to sympathize with his friend's reformatory enthusiasms. In 1814 the two men must have been on very intimate terms, for Peacock was almost the only other being to know, prior to their elopement, of the passion that had sprung up between Mary Godwin and Shelley. But it was probably in this connexion that their friendship suffered its first severe shock, for Peacock preferred Harriet to Mary. Yet, fortunately, Shelley knew the value of Peacock's intellect, and so continued to write to him, first the letters from Switzerland, and later the magnificent and frequent letters from Italy.



THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

FROM THE PAINTING BY WALLIS IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

In 1816 there came a second shock. Peacock had discovered his destiny, and published *Headlong Hall*. Shelley loved a mere ridiculous prank, and the painless blowing up of Mr. Cranium cannot fail to have delighted him; as later he must have been delighted with those ludicrous physical accidents which Peacock distributes impartially among his clowns and most respected characters, causing them suddenly to sit down backwards under the effect of an opponent's argument, or tumbling them into a pond in the middle of their own. But he was obliged to perceive that here was Peacock gibing and jesting at those very same sacred opinions he had seemed to hold. Was Peacock, then, no revolutionary? Was he no perfectibilian? Might he even be no atheist? Could he be merely trying to be funny? *This* Shelley could not believe, and he continued his relation with the most irresponsible of humorists gravely and seriously to the last. Peacock, he decided, must be plying the scourge of satire for the good of humanity—making "such a wound the knife is lost in it." "Peacock," he wrote to Hunt in 1816, "is the author of *Headlong Hall*. . . . He is an amiable man of great learning, considerable taste, an enemy to every shape of tyranny and superstitious imposture." While in 1818 he wrote to Peacock himself: "You tell me that you have finished *Nightmare Abbey*. I hope that you have given the enemy no quarter. Remember, it is a sacred war." Within a few months Shelley received his copy of *Nightmare Abbey*, and lo, the butt of Peacock's satire was no other than himself! Peacock had even caricatured Shelley's dilemma between Harriet and Mary. But Shelley was not hurt; as far as we can see the knife made no wound at all. This surgeon of the world's follies failed equally to disturb the natural magnanimity of Shelley and the supernatural vanity of Byron.[1] We do not know whether Shelley continued to believe in Peacock as a champion of the great cause of human improvement. By this date they were already widely separated in thought and feeling. Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry* let in another estranging sea, and gave rise to that curious duel between them upon the nature and functions of poetry, in which Peacock attacked with a besom and Shelley defended with a rainbow and arrows.[2] In the course of their two lives, so different in length and so opposed in kind (Peacock's was remarkably uneventful), they had curiously one interest in common. Shelley in 1819 and

[1] Byron was caricatured in the person of Mr. Cypress.

[2] Shelley writes of himself to Peacock as a "knight of the shield of shadow and the lance of gossamere."

Peacock in 1830–40 each concerned himself in the problems of steam navigation; Shelley planning a wooden boat driven by steam to ply in the Mediterranean, Peacock eventually succeeding in establishing a service of iron ships between England and India.

In most other respects we feel, when we come to know them, that no two men could be more unlike than Shelley and Peacock —and that it was especially Peacock. There was such a suggestion of hoax and spookishness about those fine qualities that Shelley had first been drawn to. What could the poet make of a liberalism which had such a way of suddenly appearing in the wrong lobby; of romance, which, just as it was putting on the richness of the fervent Romantics, shrivelled up into a burst of laughter? Shelley loved liberty, and Peacock was one of the freest creatures that ever lived—but particularly in that one respect in which Shelley was a bondsman. Peacock had no convictions; he committed himself to no "view of life"; he was not the apostle or the proselyte of any human or superhuman creed. There was no single thing in life secure from his ridicule except a good dinner and an ancient Greek. Of Shelley's poetry, though in his old age he rather formally praised it, he probably had not a genuinely high opinion, and even less understanding: while far more blind must Shelley have been to the boundless, exuberating, nonsensical *ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα* of Peacock's prose.

Peacock liked the flavour of an imperfect world, and the preposterousness of peccant humanity. Yet, though he had no use for the ethereal paradises of Shelley's dreams, he had dreams of his own, and a paradise of his own—an earthly one. He meditated upon the Golden Age—he loved to fancy an arcadian life—he liked the ancient customs of the countryside, and in his old age would have a Queen of the May crowned in his garden.

The Peacock whom Shelley admired—the cultured compiler of *Palmyra*, the graceful young sentimentalist of the *Philosophy of Melancholy*, the gifted creator of that lovely piece of classical romance, *Rhododaphne*—was, after 1818, so mastered by Peacock the humorist that many people have failed to detect that the earlier man and author survived. And yet upon that strange and piquant combination the real charm of his work depends. The out-and-out satirist becomes in the long run a little dull and monotonous. Even when he does not bite his thumb *at* us, he bites his thumb. But Peacock, all unexpectedly, betrays his satire to romance, or breaks from his mocking laughter into an occasionally tender snatch of

idealistic revolutionary dreams; the bon-vivant, mysteriously charmed into the circle of a poet who lived on bread and raisins and declared that a pudding was a prejudice, had for a time monopolized the passionate affection of that magical and strangely fascinating nature. He had betrayed his friend by making love to Harriet, and his friend's ideals by hardening into a narrow-minded materialist. In grim repentance and regret the shell had closed down on the single pearl of a lifetime.

GODWIN AND MARY

"Mr. Godwin . . . is somewhat exclusive and unsocial in his habits of mind, entertains no company but what he gives his whole time and attention to, and wisely writes over the doors of his understanding, his fancy, and his senses, 'No admittance except on business.' . . . He does not waste himself in vain aspirations and effeminate sympathies. He is blind, deaf, insensible to all but the trump of Fame."[1] Alas, poor Godwin. While Fame the glorious is trumpeting on the front doorstep, Fama the disreputable hurries round to the back entrance, is admitted on private affairs, and pushing past the blind, deaf, insensible, vainglorious dreamer, makes it her business to open many cupboards and utter a very different music from the roof. Strange is the duet that reaches us from the home of Godwin; the calm wise tones of the philosopher still greet us down the century like a dinner of savoury herbs, but she that screeches on the housetop warns us from these premises and all schemes for infallible human happiness which issue therefrom.

"I always thought," says Trelawny, who at another time had called Godwin an "Immortal," "I always thought Godwin a gross, selfish, sensual, dogmatic impostor." But Godwin was, after all, as much the victim as the perpetrator of the fraud. "The gratifications of sense," he remarks in *Political Justice*, "please at present by their imposture." How deeply the gratifications of philosophy were imposing upon himself he never even dimly suspected. He cloaked himself in the happiness of believing, as Hazlitt says, "an author the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest author in it," and he enacted his sad and shabby life with the arrogant aloofness of a stoic, and with unfailing courage in self-complacency. And yet there is something deeply pathetic in the picture of the lover incapable of intimacy; the parent earning reverence but never confidence; the idealist and moralist

[1] Hazlitt: *The Spirit of the Age*—"*Mr. Coleridge.*"

childishly, pettishly, unscrupulously weak in the face of material difficulties; ignorant to the last that nobility can only come from the heart. His nature was cramped and caged into itself as by the four walls of a prison; it might escape upwards into the spare faint realms of speculation, but never outwards into the green earth of light and love.

The facts of his life were sad enough. Poverty was early at his door, and late. Mary Wollstonecraft died after the birth of their first child; his second wife was far from amiable; his adopted daughter Fanny killed herself; his son William died as a young man. And in this list Godwin would no doubt have included what in 1816 he described to Shelley as the great calamity of his life—the elopement of his daughter Mary. Yet the impartial eye detects in this calamity—at least as it ultimately developed—a vein of something very like good fortune. Godwin's connexion with Shelley has made doubly sure for him—though not altogether in the form he would have chosen—that posthumous fame which Mary says was with him a passion. Still more, it saved him repeatedly from bankruptcy. What Shelley did for the Godwin who proclaimed himself deeply wronged, who vowed that no reparation could ever be made, but that blood-money was nevertheless his due, was far more—and continued to be more even after his legal union with Mary—than he would ever have done otherwise, for a Godwin he revered on paper but rather disliked at close quarters. And Mary seemed to share in her husband's view that Godwin was entitled to a more or less indefinite compensation.

But the tragedy of Godwin's life is not what he saw in it himself, neither his bereavement, nor those struggles with poverty which so unmanned him. It is the tragedy of the philosopher who believes that he can turn all things to gold and ends by turning himself to stone.

On one of those occasions—which, though rare, actually came about—when Godwin was humorous, he accepted a certain definition of love. "A dull, boring fellow," says Hogg, "who was accustomed, as other slow-witted seekers after truth were also, to propound questions to William Godwin and to accept his answers, when they could be extracted, as oracles, inquired one day in Shelley's presence, with all solemnity, 'Pray, William Godwin, what is your opinion of love?' The oracle was silent. After a while he who came to consult repeated his question. . . . The oracle was still silent, bu Shelley answered for him. 'My opinion of love is hat acts upon the human heart precisely as a nutmeg-

upon a nutmeg.' The grave inquirer heard the jesting answer with mute contempt, and presently repeated his question a third time. 'Pray, William Godwin, what is your opinion of love?' 'My opinion entirely agrees with that of Mr. Shelley.'" We may feel pretty sure that neither Shelley nor Godwin saw the whole joke. A better description could hardly be found for the triturating, pulverizing, emotional relations of Godwin with both his wives and both his daughters and with Shelley himself. In the first two cases Godwin was probably the nutmeg; in the last three he was certainly the grater. The comically dismal set of love-letters exchanged between Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft are a witness to—in the words of *Queen Mab*—"how great is man . . . how great his imbecility." With no scallop-shell of quiet tenderness, no staff of mutual trust, no bread and wine of spiritual intimacy, but little joy, burdened, he with the weight of his intellectual egoism, and she with the permanently embittering memory of her previous folly and heart-break,[1] these two wiseacres set out upon a proposed journey of lifelong fellowship. "You cannot imagine how happy your letter made me," writes Godwin to his newly wedded wife on June 10, 1797. "No creature expresses, because no creature feels, the tender affections so perfectly as you do; and, after all one's philosophy, it must be confessed that the knowledge that there is some one that takes an interest in one's happiness something like that which each man feels in his own, is extremely gratifying. . . . One of the pleasures I promised myself in my excursion was to increase my value in your estimation, and I am not disappointed. What we possess without intermission we inevitably hold light; it is a refinement in voluptuousness to submit to voluntary privations." But his wife knew what grater to apply to the nut of this megalomania, and on June 19 she wrote: "One of the pleasures you tell me that you promised yourself from your journey was the effect your absence might produce on me. Certainly at first my affection was increased, or rather was more alive. But now it is just the contrary. Your later letters might have been addressed to anybody, and will serve to remind you where you have been, though they resemble nothing less than mementos of affection. . . . Whatever tenderness you took away with you seems to have evaporated on the journey, and new objects and the homage of vulgar minds restored you to your icy philosophy."

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self-made dungeon of the mind, was within a few months seeking another wife, and, unfortunately for him, within a few years found one—M. J.[1] of the *Journal*, who signally failed to take Godwin's advice in an early love-letter to "manage and economize her temper," which he believed was "at bottom most excellent." A year or two before his second marriage, in a lengthy examination of his own character, Godwin noted: "No domestic connexion is fit for me but that of a person who should habitually study my gratification and happiness; in that case I should certainly not yield the palm of affectionate attentions to my companion." The second Mrs. Godwin strove for no such prize. She brandished a very different symbol, and Godwin's heart was grated to its hardest kernel.

Theory and feeling both made him an anxious and in a certain sense devoted parent, and it seems to have been from a sense of duty to his daughter Mary and his adopted daughter, Fanny Imlay,[2] that he married again. He was particularly attached to Fanny, and treated her in every way as his own child; but he did not make her happy, and her brief youth was worn away until she could endure it no longer, in perpetual discomfort and anxiety on his account, and in a sympathy which brought no reward of intimacy and confidence. His relations with Mary were still more unnatural. She adored him—at his frigid distance, with pain and tears. As a child his "calm, silent disapproval" had overwhelmed her with remorse and grief. In the shadow of it she lived for many years, for he found fault with Shelley, and he continued, while largely supported by her pen, to chide and reprove her as a corrective to her sorrows. When she lost her baby girl at Venice in 1818, her father wrote and warned her that "it is only persons of a very ordinary sort, and of a pusillanimous disposition, that sink long under a calamity of this nature. I assure you that such a recollection will be of great use to you. We seldom indulge long in depression and mourning except when we think secretly that there is something very refined in it, and that it does us honour." A year later and William Shelley [illegible] honour, a child of three, [illegible] After a month or two. [illegible] about money-troubles, he wrote [illegible]

[1] Mary Jane, widow of a Mr. Clairmont and mother of Charles Clairmont, and the foolish, clever, charming adventuress "Clare."
[2] Daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and Gilbert Imlay.

"MY DEAR MARY,—Your letter of 19th August is very grievous to me, inasmuch as you represent me as increasing the degree of your uneasiness and depression.

"You must, however, allow me the privilege of a father and a philosopher in expostulating with you on this depression. I cannot but consider it as lowering your character in a memorable degree, and putting you quite among the commonalty and mob of your sex, when I had thought I saw in you symptoms entitling you to be ranked among those noble spirits that do honour to our nature. What a falling-off is here! How bitterly is so inglorious a change to be deplored!

"What is it you want that you have not? You have the husband of your choice, to whom you seem to be unalterably attached, a man of high intellectual attainments, whatever I and some other persons may think of his morality, and the defects under this last head, if they be not (as you seem to think) imaginary, at least do not operate as towards you. You have all the goods of fortune, all the means of being useful to others, and shining in your proper sphere. But you have lost a child; and all the rest of the world, all that is beautiful, and all that has a claim upon your kindness, is nothing, because a child of two years old is dead."

And at the very end of this philosophical and fatherly epistle he implies that he values her confidence, as "frankness of communication takes off bitterness," and "true philosophy invites all communications and withholds none." Mary did not accept the invitation of philosophy, but she continued, in the face of a letter like this, to honour and to love the writer of it. When Shelley died, Godwin, with rather an excess of frankness of communication, wrote, in effect, to congratulate himself on having in future a larger share in the sympathies and certain other properties of his daughter:

"DEAR MARY,—I heard only two days ago the most afflicting intelligence to you, and in some measure to all of us, that can be imagined—the death of Shelley on the 8th ultimo. . . . All that I expressed to you about silence and not writing to you again[1] is now put an end to in the most melancholy way.

"I looked on you as one of the daughters of prosperity, elevated in rank and fortune, and I thought it criminal to intrude on you for ever the sorrows of an unfortunate old

[1] Godwin had all the preceding spring written such afflicting letters to Mary about his finances, that Shelley had been obliged to intercept some of them, Mary being in delicate health at the time.

man and a *beggar.* You are now fallen to my own level; you are surrounded with adversity and with difficulty; and *I no longer hold it sacrilege* to trouble you with my adversities. We shall now truly sympathise with each other; and whatever *misfortune or ruin* falls on me, I shall not now scruple to lay it fully before you. This sorrowful event is, perhaps, calculated to draw us nearer to each other."

And he goes on:

"Shelley lived, I know, in constant anticipation of the uncertainty of his life, though not in this way, and was anxious in that event to make the most effectual provision for you. I am impatient to hear in what way that has been done; and perhaps you will make me your lawyer in England if any steps are necessary. . . .

"I suppose you will hardly stay in Italy. In that case we shall be near to and support each other."

Mary did not stay in Italy—she came home and duly (in part) supported Godwin. Her misery, as he obviously felt, was greatly to his advantage. He occupied, for the rest of his life, a large place in her heart, and as the years went on he drew more and more satisfaction from her intellectual eminence, an ambition for which he had so sedulously cultivated in her from her girlhood. "In our family," wrote Clare once, "if you cannot write an epic poem or novel that by its originality knocks all other novels on the head, you are a despicable creature, not worth acknowledging."

MARY

"I was nursed and fed," said Mary in her old age, "with a love of glory." The trump of Fame blaring on Godwin's doorstep, tended to make in some ways "blind, deaf, and insensible" the little motherless girl who was growing up within. Somehow we feel that for the tragic anomaly of Mary Shelley's character Godwin was peculiarly responsible. He was quite as certain that his counsels and discipline would ensure her happiness as that his political theories would make a new world. But the world did not attempt to form itself on the lines of *Political Justice*, while the girl gave herself heart and mind to the one parent left her. His intellectual power and very aloofness impressed her own keen brain with a sense of his greatness, and we find his stamp in everything she wrote and nearly everything she did.

How unhappy she was, and how strange, has not perhaps been fully realized. Misfortune assailed her from without; but within lay the seeds of an incurable discontent. Born of two such parents—the cold, high-principled, selfish Theorist, and the hot-headed, high-spirited, broken-hearted Irishwoman—and moulded from earliest childhood to Godwin's mechanical ideals, she was almost as strangely compounded as her own Frankenstein's monster—of hot and cold, of lifeless theory and rash action, of feminine instinct and masculine ambition, unreconciled by a spirit greater than either: "wasting in impotent passions,"[1] seeking through life "to meet with beings," as the dæmon says, "who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities I was capable of unfolding,"[2] potentially warm and generous, "nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion,"[3] yet somehow so framed that intimate love, sympathy, and confidence she hardly ever won; and the brightness of her many generous actions was overshadowed as by some "curse of Tantalus." "It is the curse of Tantalus that a person possessing such excellent powers and so pure a mind as hers should not excite the sympathy necessary to their application to domestic life." Bitterly though we regret that Shelley *wrote* this of his wife, we can hardly blame him for sometimes feeling it. Mary seems to have appeared to several persons as an essentially "unsympathetic" character. We feel it ourselves when we read the early love-letters, the letters of wife and mother, and of the lonely struggling widow, the early diary and the late strange and pitiable journal. We feel it when we flounder, exhausted, endlessly diverted, tediously impressed, through the extraordinary hash of *Frankenstein*, with its false sentiment and ludicrous moralizing, vigour and pose and solemn silliness, and occasional gruesome power. We feel it when we look at those two portraits of Mary in her widowhood.[4] In both, however unequal as works of art, we see the same character, revealed with most convincing force. What tenderness the face possesses is in the brow, splendid though narrow, and the eyes, which are yet disconcertingly bright. The nose and mouth are sharp, and the lips very thin and set.[5] The effect of the whole face is very feminine, and at the same time very

[1] *Frankenstein*, last chapter.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] National Portrait Gallery—by Rothwell and by Stump.
[5] In a note on "A Juno" Shelley remarks that lips are "the seat of imagination."



MARY W. SHELLEY

FROM THE PAINTING BY S. J. STUMP IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

intellectual, yet certainly neither womanly nor imaginative.[1] There is something *précieuse*, and something self-conscious. It seems a character incapable of real intimacy, yet pathetically clinging and un-selfsustained; as though marked down for the hardest of human fates, solitude and self-frustration.

All that we know of Mary confirms this impression. She was ... hat is usually meant by an egoist, but all her days she ... d the light. She had been encouraged ... d she carried them anxiously about with her as a grand ... er jewels. They were remarkable and glittering talents, but they were not quickened by one single breath of genius. She was entirely devoid of real imagination. She valued Shelley's poems in her way, but the alterations and explanations in her edition convince one that she looked at them from an entirely "Godwinian" standpoint, and during his life, as far as we can judge from her letters, she took no very keen interest in his most typical work. And Shelley himself was inspired by ideals and moved in a world so different from her own that she seems often to have felt both lonely and dull in his company. The night on which she became acquainted with Trelawny she noted in her diary: "Tired with the everyday sleepiness of human intercourse, I am glad to meet with one who . . . has the rare merit of interesting my imagination." She was perpetually longing for society—less for friendship than brilliant acquaintance. Mary's "disease grows upon her with years," wrote Trelawny in 1835, "I mean her pining after distinction and the distinguished of fortune."[2] For these reasons, and because, as she afterwards acknowledged with remorse, she was frequently cold and unapproachable in her relations with her husband, she was not really happy in those very eight years, which all the rest of her life she so bitterly lamented. They were, of course, stormy years, and though she strove for Godwin's standard of philosophic detachment, she only made her troubles rankle by repression. Her diary is an imitation of Godwin's terse journal, with its grim statements of the day and hour of domestic calamities. Under September 24, 1818, she chronicles: "This is the journal of misfortunes. Shelley writes: he read '*Œdipus Tyrannus*' to me. On Tuesday, September 22, he goes to Venice. On Thursday I go to Padu

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never be Trelawny. . . . I *must* have the entire affection, devotion, and, above all, the solicitous protection of anyone who would win me." For nearly twenty years Mary Shelley had to live without any protection or cherishing whatever. But she was not the daughter of such parents for nothing—courage, intellectual resource, and self-respect supported her in a kind of dogged endurance which fills us with astonished admiration. Through years of solitude and poverty, saving both her only son and her old father from want by her literary work, always intellectually keen, and shining in what society she was able to get (and it was a good deal, though she often complained that it was too little), always beautiful and imposing, she presented to the world what one friend has described as a character "entirely in harmony; no jarring discords—no incongruous, anomalous, antagonistic opposites . . .," "perfect unity," and a "grave gentleness." It was a magnificent victory, but behind was a losing cause.

"My head aches. My heart—my hapless heart—is deluged with bitterness. Great God! if there be any pity for human suffering, tell me what I am to do. I strive to study, I strive to write, but I cannot live without loving and being loved, without sympathy; if this is denied to me, I must die. Would that the hour were come!"[1] The kind of sympathy she craved her friends apparently denied her—it was the curse of Tantalus.

Mary Shelley was deeply reserved, but with that odd sort of reserve which is sometimes uncannily lacking in restraint. A kind of self-consciousness pervaded the very recesses of her soul. We feel that she was distant even with herself. The harrowing pages of her Journal from the time of Shelley's death almost till her own are loaded with self-criticism, self-analysis, repression, and exhortation; her unsleeping and self-centred grief, conscious of itself, and of her, weeping, pours out like a tragic actor monologue after monologue, which are never quite spontaneous for all their bitterness and hard despair, nor deeply moving for all their manifest courage and pain. We pity, but we do not share, her grief; it is a too frozen passion. But it arrests us as one more testimony to that power in Shelley which made all who had known him feel after his death that they had lived in the presence of some godlike being. The first entry after the poet's death is on October 2, 1822, and we read: "On the 8th Jy I finished my journal. This is a curious coincidence. The date still remains—the fatal 8th—a monument to show that all ended then. And I begin again?

[1] Journal, September 17, 1825.

Oh, never. But several motives induce me, when the day has gone down, and all is silent around me, steeped in sleep, to pen, as occasion wills, my reflections and feelings. First, I have no friend. For eight years I communicated, with unlimited freedom, with one whose genius, far transcending mine, awakened and guided my thoughts. I conversed with him, rectified my errors of judgment; obtained new lights from him; and my mind was satisfied. Now I am alone—oh, how alone! The stars may behold my tears, and the wind drink my sighs, but my thoughts are a sealed treasure which I can confide to none. . . . O my beloved Shelley! how often during those happy days—happy, though chequered—I thought how superiorly gifted I had been in being united to one to whom I could unveil myself, and who could understand me! Well, then, now I am reduced to these white pages, which I am to blot with dark imagery. . . . Beneath all this my imagination never flags. Literary labours, the improvement of my mind, and the enlargement of my ideas, are the only occupations that elevate me from my lethargy."

Nov. 10. "I have made my first probation in writing, and it has done me much good, and I get more calm. . . . I am allowed to have some talent—that is, sufficient, methinks, to cause my irreparable misery; for if one has genius, what a delight it is to be associated with a superior! Mine own Shelley! the sun knows of none to be likened to you—brave, wise, noble-hearted, full of learning, tolerance, and love. Love! What a word for me to write! Yet, my miserable heart, permit me yet to love—to see him in beauty, to feel him in beauty, to be interpenetrated by the sense of his excellence; and then to love simply, eternally, ardently, and not fruitlessly; for I am still his—still the chosen one of that blest spirit—still vowed to him for ever and ever!"

Nov. 11. "A cold heart! Have I a cold heart? God knows! But none need envy the icy region this heart encircles . . . it would be cold enough if all were as I wished it—cold, or burning in the flame for whose sake I forgive this, and would forgive every other imputation—that flame in which your heart, beloved, lay unconsumed."

Feb. 24. "What is it that moves up and down in my soul, and makes me feel as if my intellect could master all but my fate? I fear it is only youthful ardour. . . . I may have misgivings, weaknesses, and momentary lapses into unworthy despondency, but—save in devotion towards my Boy—fortune has emptied her quiver, and to all her future shafts I oppose courage, hopelessness of aught on

this side, with a firm trust in what is beyond the grave. . . .
"I have long accustomed myself to the study of my own heart . . . I have found," etcetera.

May 31. "The glory of the dream is gone. I am a cloud which the light of sunset has passed. Give me patience in [illegible] night——"[1]

[illegible] was intensible to work.

In her Journal for October 26, 1824, she wrote:

"How long is it since an emotion of joy filled my once exulting heart, or beamed from my once bright eyes? I am young still, though age creeps on apace; but I may not love any but the dead.

"I was loved once! Still let me cling to the memory; but to live for oneself alone, to read, and communicate your reflections to none; to write, and be cheered by none; to weep, and in no bosom; no more on thy bosom, my Shelley, to spend my tears—this is misery!"

She soon set to work, however, upon a new novel, and for many years after that she was occupied pretty continuously with writing. Yet she did not write Shelley's life. This would surely have been the natural outlet for a natural grief, to one whose main pleasure was in literary work. It is true that Shelley's father very soon forbade the *publication* of both life and poems; but there was nothing to prevent her from writing it and biding her time. At first she meant to do so—"I shall write his life and thus occupy myself in the only manner from which I can derive consolation." But Sir Timothy's prohibition found nothing done. At length, in 1839, permission was given for an edition of Shelley's works, with notes, and Mary fulfilled her task in wretchedness—"torn to pieces by memory. Would that all were mute in the grave!" The years in which she worked at this "labour of love" were, according to her biographer,[2] the "hardest, dreariest, and most laborious she had ever known," and she ended with a severe attack of illness. There was not in her feeling for her husband sufficient fire to combat the deluge of despair in which all such memories plunged her. Her love for Shelley was curiously distant, even when distant only with excess of admiration. In the autumn of 1822 she wrote: "What a strange life mine has been. Love, youth, fear, and

[1] All these are only brief extracts. There are pages and pages in this vein: about her own talents, her heart, her misery, and her need of Shelley's angelic nature to sustain her.

[2] Mrs Julian Marshall.

fearlessness led me early from the regular routine of life, and I united myself to this being, who, not one of *us*, though like us, was pursued by numberless miseries and annoyances, in all of which I shared." Eight years of married life, and so tragic an ending, and still her husband is "this being," "not one of us"! What wonder that Shelley wrote:

"One stood on my path who seemed
As like the glorious shape which I had dreamed
As is the Moon whose changes ever run
Into themselves, to the eternal Sun;
The cold, chaste Moon, the Queen of Heaven's bright isles,
Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles,
That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame
Which ever is transformed, yet still the same,
And warms not but illumines.

. . . .

"And I was laid asleep, spirit and limb,
And all my being became bright or dim
As the Moon's image in a summer sea,
According as she smiled or frowned on me;
And there I lay, within a chaste, cold bed:
Alas, I there was nor alive nor dead:—
For at her silver voice came Death and Life,
Unmindful each of their accustomed strife.

. . . .

"And through the cavern without wings they flew,
And cried, '*Away, he is not of our crew,*'
I wept, and though it be a dream, I weep."

Of so little avail is it to constantly analyse one's own heart, that quite late in her life Mary could write in her Journal: "The living intercourse is the vital heat. Debarred from that, how have I pined and died!" We cannot believe that it was either shocked convention or moderate poverty which debarred her, as she thought. She did indeed have several true friendships—but the most trusted and loved of her friends, Jane Williams, broke what was left of her widowed heart by coldness and disloyalty, and she never recovered from the blow. Several of Shelley's old friends turned against her, including Hunt—on whom, when at length in 1844 her son came into his own, she bestowed a pension once promised by Shelley. She was consistently generous and ready to help, but, dimly perhaps, those about her were aware that her moods "ever ran into themselves," that she never warmed, and that she, like Godwin, found love in all its forms a wearing and dangerous experience. In her Journal of October, 1824, she writes: "The struggle is hard that can give rise to misanthropy in one, like me, attached to my fellow creatures." But this —not exactly misanthropy but a certain harshness—had been

in her from the first. Did she not write in an early love letter to Shelley, à propos of Mrs. Godwin: "do you not hate her, my love?"—a phrase that makes one shudder? And in her diary for October, 1822, "I shall commemorate the virtues of the only creature worth loving or living for . . .," a sentiment she repeated in her preface to her edition of Shelley's poems: "Anyone, once attached to Shelley, must feel all other affections, however true and fond, as wasted on barren soil in comparison." During her struggles over this very edition, when Hogg and Trelawny found fault with her for certain omissions, she wrote in her diary: "In so arduous a task, others might ask for encouragement and kindness from their friends—I know mine better. I am unstable, sometimes melancholy, and have been called on some occasions imperious; but I never did an ungenerous act in my life. I sympathize warmly with others, and have wasted my heart in their love and service." But people do not like others to waste their hearts in their service; they do not wish to be nutmeg-graters on their friends.

And so the proud, self-centred, solitary struggle went on. At the end, when her son inherited the Shelley estates, when she had money, society, travel, and a happy home, a kind of peace settled upon the troubled waters. The storm abated which the alien spirit of Shelley had brought upon them; the memory of him was less dazzling and less despairing; his influence yielded to the original and more natural influence of Godwin—and even that was mellowed.

Then we look back over this queer life again—and are tempted to think it was perhaps not so tragic after all; such a philosophic heart, so often analysed, and a so self-satisfied intellect must have been immune to the deepest suffering. But just as we are turning away a little coldly we are arrested again by some outcry of convincing grief, some gesture of fine courage. "What has my life been?" she wrote once to Trelawny, who was reproaching her for shrinking, as she undoubtedly did, from bringing herself before the public in any life of her father or husband.. "What is it? Since I lost Shelley I have been alone, and worse. . . . Do you think that I have not felt, that I do not feel all this? If I have been able to stand up against the breakers which have dashed against my stranded, wrecked bark, it has been by a sort of passive, dogged resistance, which has broken my heart, while it a little supported my spirit. . . . I am obliged to guard against low spirits as my worst disease, and I do guard, and usually I am not in low spirits. Why then do you awaken

me to thought and suffering by forcing me to explain the motives of my conduct? Could you not trust that I thought anxiously, decided carefully, and from disinterested motives, not to save myself, but my child, from evil? Pray let the stream flow quietly by, as glittering on the surface as it may, and do not awaken the deep waters which are full of briny bitterness. I never wish anyone to dive into the secret depths; be content, if I can render the surface safe sailing, that I do not annoy you with clouds and tempests, but turn the silvery side outward, as I ought, for God knows I would not render any living creature so miserable as I could easily be, and I would also guard myself from the sense of woe which I tie hard about, and sink low, low, out of sight and fathom line."

To have known Shelley, or half known him, and to have lost him was a terrible fate. But if Shelley had lived, Mary would not have been happy. We can only imagine her contented in the part she would have filled so well—of a brilliant society lady, much admired, and of great service to all about her, rarely alone, and never forced to be too deeply moved. She would have been an egoist still, but a graceful one: her feelings and intellectual powers would have embellished and not tormented her. The cold brain of Godwin and the Irish emotionality of Mary Wollstonecraft might then have ceased to grate one upon another. But destiny had decided far otherwise in making her for eight years the wife of Shelley, and visiting her with the two experiences—both for her too searching—of his love and of his loss.

CHAPTER IV

SHELLEY'S LIFE. THE FIRST TWENTY-TWO YEARS: 1792–1814

> ". . . a heart that had been turned aside
> From Nature's way by outward accidents,
> And which was thus confounded, more and more
> Misguided, and misguiding."
>
> *Wordsworth, The Prelude.*

THE true history of the first twenty-two years of Shelley's life may well wring a smile from the most confirmed sentimentalist, and from the most hardened humorist a sigh.

These years are a merciless mixture of nobility and nonsense, but they fill us finally with a feeling of wonder and gratitude that original virtue—that discredited seed—is so hard to kill: that its toughness and vitality will resist the combined forces of evil nurture and evil inheritance: that hampered and delayed it may be, crushed, starved, exposed—but it will blossom in the end.

Shelley was hampered to such an extent that, till he was nearly twenty-three his poetical genius could not raise its head. He freed himself at length, after enduring and inflicting considerable suffering, by tearing to pieces the net his upbringing had woven about him, and his own impatient struggles knotted at every turn.

Most great poets are guilty of Juvenilia that are sorry stuff; but even when they show no promise, they do not fly in the very face of poetry to repudiate her. Shelley till his twenty-second year forswore poetry, unconsciously in act, and deliberately in theory, though he did not cease from dimly desiring her. He who nurses unacted desires, Blake said, breeds pestilence. The education of Shelley—an education grimly determined in its aim of driving back and hammering down,[1]

[1] As Dr. and Mrs. Hume put it, when they applied for an[illegible]on the guardianship of Shelley's children by Harriet: "The gra[illegible] of a Parent and Guardian towards children is promptly an[illegible] repressing . . . extirpating," etc., etc.

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yet powerless to do more than deflect so strong a spirit as his, his education and his early experiences resulted in diseases of mind and body, a distemperature of life, which affected him till the end. The fevers of his being are revealed to us not merely in the recollections of friends, but are chronicled, every pulse, in his letters. They are extraordinary enough; but the conditions that produced them were still more strange.

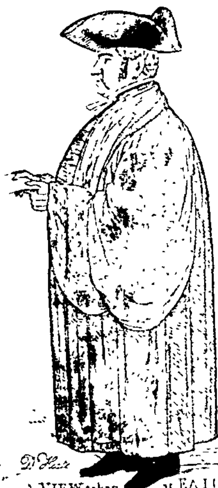
The facts of Shelley's life, only too many of them, have been exposed for years to the thumbing and fingering of a bastard form of biographico-literary criticism. There are still unpublished letters; still journals awaiting absolution and the robe of respectability and innocuousness which time is supposed to confer.[1] We may conclude that almost all that is pleasing and estimable—and it is very much—has been published already, along with some passages that any fair-minded public would have wished laughingly, or forgivingly, burned.[2] We have no need of any "revelations" to complete our understanding of Shelley, whether as a man or a poet. If, from some mysterious pigeon-hole, "something" is eventually drawn forth, and triumphantly brought to light, it is likely to prove neither more interesting, nor better fitted for publicity than the little washing bill which Catherine Morland in the dead of night abstracted from the ebony cabinet.

Even before the publication of Dowden's *Life*, with its mass of new fact and collected anecdote, anyone might see Shelley plain from the letters and poems already available, and the accounts of his contemporaries.[3] It is questionable whether

[1] Some also may possibly be waiting for the editor who shall be in a position to bid the highest sum for the privilege of a peep. (That most unattractive volume *Letters about Shelley* throws some curious side-lights on methods of dealing with the relics of great men.)

[2] It is some satisfaction to know that certain of these documents *were* burned. "Allingham told me lately to my horror" wrote W. M. Rossetti to Richard Garnett (see *Letters about Shelley*), "that the Shelley's (Sir Percy and Lady Shelley) have been making a cremation of Shelley documents, including, he fears, papers about the separation from Harriet. Ye Gods!!!" As Shelley's son and son's wife were by no means indifferent to the poet's reputation, W. M. Rossetti's "horror" seems misplaced. On the other hand, his own conception of Shelley's character and behaviour, formed without the encouragement of these probably displeasing documents, is one which might well fill with horror any less resolute idolater.

[3] I do not, of course, mean to suggest that nothing really valuable has been added of late to Shelleyan Biography. Mr. Ingpen's collected edition of the letters—in spite of its frequent and unexplained omissions—is a tremendous asset, and the same editor's *Shelley in England* has a few letters of value, and enables us to form a wonderfully clear picture of Shelley's father. While anecdotes of Shelley from the pen of a con-



DR. KEATE, MASTER OF THE LOWER SCHOOL WHEN SHELLEY WENT TO ETON

FROM AN ENGRAVING BY R. DIGHTON

the personality of any great man has ever been so perfectly preserved, and yet it is true that for more than two generations that personality was utterly misjudged by the general public, and to a great extent it is so still.

His short, turbulent, erring life, has been viewed from two opposite standpoints. Lovers of his character and ideals have sought to excuse his life for what he was; others have looked no further than some few of his acts to condemn him. The truth I think is in the *tertium quid*—his life excuses him. When Matthew Arnold, genuinely but needlessly pained by his own not very creditable misreading of the facts of that life, exclaimed: "What a set! What a world!" it had apparently never entered his head that Shelley might have whole-heartedly agreed with him;[1] that Shelley was in fact more pained by the "sordid horror" of Godwin's house, by the deceit of Hogg, the "brutal selfishness" of Byron, the cringing snobbery of Mr. Timothy Shelley, and the drunkenness of his patron the Duke of Norfolk, than even the Inspector of Schools himself. And to judge of this world from the safe respectability of mid-Victoria, is a very different thing from growing up, a sensitive, friendless, passionate nature, in the midst of it. Hazlitt wrote in 1824 that "It was a misfortune to any man of talent to be born in the latter end of the last century." To Shelley the misfortune of being the son of his father, of being a subject of the most dissolute and despicable of rulers, of being the victim of methods of education which would have made Matthew Arnold groan, of being intended for the dullness and degradation so frequently veiled under the term of "the life of a country gentleman" was misfortune indeed. He met it, and transformed it—but the struggle left its scars upon him. The immensity of that struggle is measured by the contrast between the world in which Mr. Timothy would have wished his son to live and the world which Shelley had created for and within himself before he died.

There is nothing to show that the first ten years of the poet's life, spent in the company of devoted sisters and a kindly mother, were anything but happy [illegible]

pranks and childish imaginings, but without a trace of morbidity or brooding. Nature was early a source of joy to him, and the large garden of his home, at Field Place in Sussex, and the beautiful country in the neighbourhood were a constant delight. Of Shelley's mother not very much is known. She was far less prejudiced than her husband, but her open-mindedness seems to have sprung rather from indifference and coldness, and to have been of no service whatever to her son in his efforts after liberty of mind and act—though she never denounced and forsook him on account of his opinions, as his father did. On the contrary, she seems to have continued in her passive way to love him, until time and distance separated him completely from her life.

Mr. Timothy Shelley, on the other hand, was one of those unfortunate people supplied by Providence with a number of very good ingredients, so unsuitably mixed and so ridiculously proportioned that there was not one that profited him anything. Liberality, culture, kindness, they all stirred in him, but when brought to the birth in action all proved abortions. Yet their very existence deprived his will of firmness, and when he chose tyranny, his better feelings made him appear like a tyrant of stuff and straw, spluttering out squibs from a flapping coat-sleeve. Imagining himself a true type of revered patriarch, a shepherd to his wife and daughters, and to his son a veritable Chesterfield,[1] poor Mr. Timothy ceased to be obeyed as soon as his back was turned, and ceased to be eloquent as soon as his mouth was opened. His epistolary style throbbed with ambition, but remained perpetually floored by the difficulties of grammar and construction. It sprawls before us, revealing to our modern eyes in one wild helpless mellay the pride, grief, pomposity, hopes and disappointments, the illiteracy, obstinacy and vanity of its creator.

The bad angel of Mr. Shelley, that which turned all his good into evil, was his idol, Public Opinion. His slight leanings towards liberality on matters religious and intellectual were sacrificed before it: there was apparently nothing and nobody in the world so dear to him as its patronizing grin. In politics he remained labelled as a Whig because his patron the Duke of Norfolk wore the same colour. The Duke was "a sensualist, glutton, drunkard and gambler"—and "dirty,"[2] but Mr. Shelley had no hesitation in describing him to his

[1] See Hogg, chap. ix.

[2] See Ingpen's *Shelley in England*, p. 12, and his edition of the *Letters*, p. xxxv.

son as one whose "exalted mind will protect me at the moment, and with the world."

Religion was another subject on which Mr. Timothy was determined to be fashionable. To take religion seriously—to ponder about it, and question it, as his son did, was most unfashionable. To be very strict or pious was also rather dowdy. Medwin relates how Mr. Timothy and Percy were once walking in Horsham and "met the chaplain of the gaol in his canonicals just returned from administering the last consolations of religion to a criminal before his execution. "Well," exclaimed Mr. Timothy, "Old soul-saver! How did you turn the rascal off?" The effect on Percy of such incidents might be imagined—but not by his father.

During Shelley's first term at Oxford, when he was honestly sifting his doubts and speculations, he attempted to discuss his problems with Mr. Timothy: "He for a time listened to my arguments; he allowed the impossibility (considered [illegible]

had agreed so harmoniously, he started at the bare idea of some facts generally believed never having existed, and silenced me with an equine argument, in effect with the words 'I believe because I do believe'"[1] Naturally Shelley did not continue to confide his intellectual puzzles to his father, and quite failed to realize that theological discussion was one of the things on which that gentleman plumed himself particularly.

There was still literature which might have proved a common interest between father and son. But it was yet another of Mr. Shelley's unprofitable affections. His son's first efforts to write pleased him greatly; he was ready to pay printers' bills, and was extremely anxious for him to win the Oxford prize poem. Marvellously, in fact, did he distinguish himself among the fathers of poets by actually encouraging his son's literary schemes. But once again, he reaped no reward; for no sooner was his son beginning to grope his way towards the merest outskirts of literary power than the opinions he expressed drove the father, terrified for his idol Public Opinion, to turn his back on the young man and his fame for ever. Mary Shelley experienced only too bitterly the opposition of this strange man to the preservation of every line, letter and anecdote that testified to his son's greatness. Craving distinction, Mr. Timothy covered himself with insignificance.

[1] To Hogg, January 11, 1811.

Affection from so warm-hearted a son he might surely have had; in the early days he apparently did have it, for Shelley's sisters remembered how when their father was ill the boy was continually watching and listening at the door of the sick-room.[1] But Mr. Timothy seems to have made this affection a matter of his dignity—the surest method of losing it. "The habits of thinking of my father and myself," Shelley wrote to Godwin in 1812, "never coincided. Passive obedience was inculcated and enforced in my childhood. I was required to love, because it was *my duty* to love; it is scarcely necessary to remark that coercion obviated its own intention."

As soon as a real breach occurred between father and son, as soon, that is to say, as Shelley's views had been publicly censured by his expulsion from college, Mr. Timothy's vanity led him to mismanage, bully and insult his son into an irreconcilable estrangement. Refusing to admit that a young man of nineteen had any right to judge for himself what he should believe, or what occupation he should choose, Mr. Timothy exhorted and threatened him by turns; the genuineness of his grief detracting from the dignity of his tyrannical attitude, but softening it no whit. His son was to return home, to cease to communicate with his friend and fellow-sufferer Hogg; he must place himself under the care of some gentleman selected by Mr. Timothy—he must give himself up, in fact, like a naughty child—he must apologize to the Fellows of his College; he must recant his opinions: "These terms are so necessary to your well-being, and to the value which I cannot but entertain, that you may abandon your errors and present unjustifiable and wicked opinions, that I am resolved to withdraw myself from you, and leave you to the punishment and misery that belongs to the wicked pursuit of an opinion so diabolical and wicked as that which you have dared to declare; if you *shall* not accept the proposals *I* shall go home on Thursday.—I am your affectionate and most afflicted Father."

This was the ultimatum of Mr. Timothy, and through the years that followed, though Shelley made various attempts at a reconciliation, driven by poverty to try many different appeals and some flattery, Mr. Timothy's ultimatum did not change, either in its general style, or in its main demand that Shelley must alter his opinions. Shelley did not, and Mr. Timothy felt himself a most ill-used man. When a mutual

[1] But in his letter to Godwin of January 16, 1812, Shelley says: "I never loved my father—it was not from hardness of heart, for I have loved and do love warmly."

friend and would-be peacemaker reported that the poor outcast youth, who was anxious to be reconciled, had expressed "affection for his mother and sister," Mr. Shelley characteristically and pathetically underlined the words and inserted the marginal note "never to me."

"Never to me" might have been the motto of Mr. Timothy's existence. He was healthy, rich, and died respected, but it is questionable whether he was ever really satisfied with what he got out of life. Perhaps he even dimly suspected the unkindest of all the tricks that Fortune played upon him. He was condemned to be an abject worshipper of "the thing," who never could be "the thing" in anything. He was incurably, ineffaceably eccentric. His idol accepted all the incense and laughed at him.

"Pray who is that very strange old man," said the Earl of Oxford to his neighbour at a dinner at the Duke of Norfolk's—Mr. Timothy's revered patron and leader—"Pray who is that very strange old man at the top of the table, sitting next His Grace, who talks so much, so loudly, and in so extraordinary a manner, and all about himself?"

"He is my father," Percy replied, "and he is a very strange old man indeed."[1]

In neither of his parents, it may be seen, could Shelley find much to help or guide him. For his sisters, especially for the next in age to himself, Elizabeth, he had in boyhood a very keen affection; but not one of them had apparently enough independence or originality of character to be a companion to him on equal terms. Elizabeth, before the days of her brother's disgrace with the family, shared in his literary pursuits, and they published together a volume of equally bad verses. In a letter to Hogg, in 1810, Shelley speaks of her great love for him: and later writes, "I wish you knew Elizabeth, she is a great consolation to me." His third sister, "Hellen," seems, perhaps on account of her extreme youth, to have been the last member of his family to tolerate her brother's opinions. Nearly a year after his family had practically disowned him, many months after his elopement with Harriet, Shelley made one last attempt to get in touch with his sisters. A letter to Hellen, which, in spite of many contrivances to smuggle it through, never reached her, was recently discovered among the papers of Mr. Timothy's lawyers.[2]

In his persevering attachment to an uninspiring and u

[1] Hogg, p. 423.
[2] Published by Mr. Ingpen in his *Shelley in England*.

responsive family circle, Shelley revealed one of his most marked characteristics. He was, for a man of genius, unusually easy to please, and childishly uncritical. It was not till nearly at the end of his life that he began to judge people by what they did, rather than by what they professed. His response to any affection, or sympathy, was only too swift, for if anything happened to disillusion him his revulsion was all the more violent and unreasonable. His early life is almost entirely made up of feverish reactions of this kind—against societies, persons, ideas and institutions.

The first revulsion, not against an individual, but against a whole world in miniature, awaited him when he left home at ten years old for Sion House Preparatory School. His cousin, Tom Medwin, was already a senior boy there, and to him we owe an account of his cousin's schooldays, diffuse, muddleheaded, and often inaccurate, but on broad lines convincing. Into the middle of sixty boys " mostly the sons of London shopkeepers, of rude habits and coarse manners," the little boy was flung, by his delicate frame and " expression of exceeding sweetness and innocence," thoroughly adapted to be the butt of his companions. In place of his beautiful home he inherited a playground " between four stone walls," and would sit in the gloomy schoolroom drawing pictures on his slate (as afterwards on the margins of his poems and letters) of the cedars and pines that grew at Field Place. For his sisters' devoted companionship he had now but their eagerly-awaited letters, and must endure the bullying of schoolboys, ranging up to eighteen years of age, and the tyranny, always well fortified with the birch, of the old type of pedagogue. These things in themselves might have done him little harm : many a sensitive child has had to suffer them, and in after life has looked back with shudders mixed with amusement to the distant dwindling shadow of childish misery. The passions engendered by such an experience are soon lost when the man emerges out of this into the real world. But for Shelley there was no emergence. From Sion House to Eton, from Eton to Oxford, from Oxford into the England of 1811, it was progress not in variety, but in intensity. Petty, but persevering tyranny, coarseness of word and deed, an utter cynicism which cultivated prejudice as a protection against anarchy, and enforced religion, not as a moral support, but as the prop of materialistic respectability ; a society without ideals, moved only by the fear of liberty, and the passion of unreason—such was the larger world of which Sion House was a reflection. The England of Shelley's time and circle

was a bad Public School on a large scale, with all its faults, and its very few virtues.

Shelley met this world on the very threshold of his boyhood and, all unfortified as he was by parental guidance, or a home tradition, he learnt Revolt before he found Faith. He re-

learned. His rebellious grief converted him from a clinging and sociable child into a strange and solitary one. "When a holiday relieved us from our tasks," says Medwin, "and the other boys were engaged in such sports as the narrow limits of our prison court allowed, Shelley, who entered into none of them, would pace backwards and forwards along the southern wall, indulging in various vague and undefined ideas, the chaotic elements . . . of what afterwards produced so beautiful a world." He revolted from the dull and dunderheaded teaching that was doled out to him, and still more from the coarseness and obscenities with which this teaching was made palatable to these little boys of ten.[1] Coming from home as Medwin describes him, a "spirit of innocence and virginity," he was soon sharing with the other boys whatever fiction the local library, a "low circulating one," chose to provide. By dwelling more upon the "Anne Radcliffes" and the noxious horrors of Monk Lewis than upon the realism of Richardson, Fielding and Smollett, as Medwin says he did, he was saving a little of his childish innocence, perhaps, but at considerable cost to his mind and future literary style.

One other door by which Shelley escaped from his prison house proved to be as stimulating to his intellect and imagination, as the fictions of Frightfulness were deadening. It was at Sion House that he first had a glimpse of what was then the mere farthing rushlight of scientific knowledge. But it was a glimpse which filled him with astonishment and delight, and first started him upon his course of independent thought and speculation. Natural Philosophy, as it was then called, was, to the mass of the people, a fascinating and dangerous wizardry —something rather like astrology, a combination of matter-of-fact and magic. Scientific toys, orreries, galvanic batteries, fire-balloons, and even so respectable a toy as the microscope, became Shelley's passion. The idea of a plurality of worlds delighted him, and the thought that some planets might be more favoured than our own: he "was enchanted with the

[1] See Medwin's account.

idea that we should, as spirits, make the grand tour through the heavens." Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world! Into this realm where imagination and knowledge might go forth hand in hand, he rushed impetuously, little foreseeing how far it would lead him from the narrow beliefs and spiritless ideals of his day. It was not long before he discovered that the worst tyranny was not that of the fagging system and the flogging stool—but that which forbade free movement to the mind.

Shelley left Sion House with a formed code of rebellion, and the first beginnings of a faith. But he was no misanthrope, and even in that narrow world had made a passionate friendship, which, though it did not persist, and though the object of it remains unknown, he remembered and described most touchingly in after years. In a fragmentary essay on friendship he recalls this first enthusiastic love; how inexpressibly eloquent and generous his friend had seemed to him: how "we used to walk the whole play-hours up and down by some moss-covered palings pouring out our hearts in youthful talk; I remember," he says, "in my simplicity writing to my mother a long account of his admirable qualities and my own devoted attachment. I suppose she thought me out of my wits, for she returned no answer to my letter."

When Shelley entered Eton, at twelve years old, he was much better prepared to deal with his uncongenial surroundings than he had been at Sion House. Physically, though not strong, he was capable of asserting himself, and his violent passion when roused made his occasional outbursts of vengeance against his persecutors no laughing matter. At the same time his independence of spirit was more unyielding than ever, and Eton had a whole world of tradition and aristocratic prejudice, far more formidable than the suburban conservatism of Sion House. Shelley rushed headlong into conflict with it all. Fagging was the law, a law built into the very structure of a society where the ideal was a dominant class armed with *savoir-faire*, and brute force. Shelley refused to fag. He was already prepared to champion through thick and thin the physical liberty of the individual. Soon he found that he must also defend his liberty of thought. His devotion to scientific studies, his keen speculations on every subject, his fearless judgment, soon earned him the name of "Mad Shelley," or "Shelley the Atheist." Many forms of persecution were tried upon him; their effect was to make him unhappy and solitary: with one or two real friends he withdrew into the ever-widening kingdom of his mind. "He

stood apart from the whole school," wrote a contemporary, "a being never to be forgotten." Magic and Monk Lewis; science and metaphysics; Pliny's *De Deo* and *Paracelsus*; Shelley had accommodation for them all. Writing to Godwin in 1812, he says: "Ancient books of chemistry and magic were perused with an enthusiasm of wonder almost amounting to belief. My sentiments were unrestrained by anything within me; external impediments were numerous and strongly applied; their effect was merely temporary." Among such impediments was a rule forbidding books on chemistry at Eton. Shelley of course disregarded both the letter and the spirit (whatever that was) of such a mere muzzling order; and when his housemaster discovered him amidst the detonations of explosives, enveloped in a blue flame, and demanded "What on earth are you doing, Shelley?" he quietly replied "Please, sir, I am raising the devil." Utterly inflexible and intractable as he was, he was naturally no better liked by the masters than by most of the boys. The friends of his choice would listen, but without understanding, to his strange talk and speculations of the world beyond the grave. In after years one of his closest Eton friends had no better comment to make on his life than to remark with tears, "Poor dear Shelley! It was no wonder that he went wrong."[1] By far the strongest influence upon his development at Eton came from an old man of seventy, the eccentric Dr. Lind of Windsor. The wide-mindedness and tolerance, gentleness and intellectual keenness of the Doctor was what Shelley had been looking for in vain. He seemed to have found a father at last; and he never forgot, as his poems testify, his love and gratitude for this truest friend of his boyhood. It was Dr. Lind who lent Shelley Godwin's *Political Justice*. This book, which was to have so great an effect upon him when he re-read it a few years later, now probably combined with all that he had seen of selfishness, prejudice and unreasoning tyranny at Eton, to turn his thoughts partly away from metaphysical speculation, into the practical realm of politics.

Political Justice, with Condorcet's theories of the perfectibility of Man, fell upon a ready soil. But there was yet needed far bitterer experience, and more effective persecution, to convert Shelley from an enthusiast for liberty and [illegible]ogress, into a fanatical worshipper of them, prepared to s[illegible] the whole of his passionate and imaginative nature on [illegible] of Reason and Revolution.

His eight years of school life had intensified all [illegible]

[1] See Dowden, vol. i, p. 26.

feelings, strengthened his determination, and matured his mind; but to be driven into a position of isolation and defiance during these years of adolescence is a dangerous thing, and both as a poet and a man he suffered from it. He was made to seek remedies for the ills of the world not from a study of human life and character but from a ransacking of intellectual theories. His tendency to be abstract was encouraged, and his imagination was deprived of its natural food. At this time he was singularly unliterary, and poetry seems to have meant very little to him except as a setting for romantic stories. He was enthusiastic about Southey's *Thalaba*, and later about Landor's *Gebir*, and he read translations of German ballads. But he asked of literature mainly two things—doctrine and excitement. Monk Lewis was still a favourite, the immediate source of his own novel *Zastrozzi* published just before he left Eton.

He is said to have acquired whatever classics were expected of him with great ease, and to have had a remarkable memory. But in classics he sought above all things *doctrine*: he preferred Lucretius to Virgil: for Lucretius, Pliny and Cicero he reserved all his admiration. Until 1813 Homer is never mentioned in his letters (where indeed before that date Literature, as such, is rarely mentioned at all). Plato he read in translation only, while at Oxford, although he was quite familiar with Greek; obviously in order to get the heart out of Plato's theories as quickly as possible without bothering about his style! Both these attitudes to literature—the love of mere doctrine, and the love of mere sensation—were harmful; the latter was definitely unhealthy. He never quite learned to distinguish between the terrible and the ghoulish, and, as in the tenth canto of the *Revolt of Islam*, could present them side by side. Both attitudes impaired his judgment of literature, and it remained untrustworthy to the last.

What Shelley needed when he left Eton to put him right with himself and the world was worthy intellectual companionship, and, above all, the guidance of a mature and gentle teacher.

"He certainly was not happy at Eton," wrote his friend Halliday many years later, "for his was a disposition that needed especial personal superintendence, to watch and cherish and direct all his noble aspirations, and the remarkable tenderness of his heart. He had great moral courage and feared nothing but what was base and false and low."

Back he went to Field Place in the summer of 1810 to find his imperturbable mother ruling over her growing troupe of

in his will for several of his bastards. As for Mr. Timothy himself, Shelley had long ago realized that from him he had nothing to learn.[2] He was very suspicious of his father's acts and motives—sometimes unjustifiably, as when he credited a servant's story that Mr. Timothy meant to shut him up in a private lunatic asylum. But Mr. Timothy certainly deserved as little respect from Percy as he received. Medwin says that he was present at a conversation between father and son at which Mr. Timothy remarked that he would provide for as many natural children as his son chose to get, but he would never forgive a *mésalliance*. The son preferred the threat to the offer, and in due course put Mr. Timothy in a position to fulfil it. It is certainly pretty clear that Mr. Shelley never put before his son any ideal higher than his own of outward respectability and worldly success. Already he was imagining that Percy would step into his shoes, inherit the immense fortune of both branches of the family, and make a name for himself in Parliament.

The Duke of Norfolk also urged Shelley to take up a political career. But Shelley had not emerged from Eton like Proserpine from Hades; he felt no dazzle of the dawn and saw no flowery paths. He was merely dumbfounded by the incredible stupidity and grossness of his elders. "I went with my father several times to the House of Commons," he told Hogg during their Oxford days, "and what creatures did I see there! what faces! what an expression of countenance! what wretched beings!—good God! what men did we meet about the House—in the lobbies and passages! and my father was so civil to all of them." Obviously it was not through Parliament that Shelley expected to achieve his New Earth. "How can we think well of the world?" he wrote. "Surely these moralists suppose young men are like young puppies (as perhaps

[1] Shelley must have understood [illegible] betw[illegible] satu[illegible] littl[illegible] wan[illegible] human creatures some [illegible]ariety, and

"Some a living require,
And others desire
An old fellow out of the way."

[2] Shelley to Godwin, January 16, 1812: "I have known no tutor or adviser (*not excepting my father*) from whose lessons and suggestions I have not recoiled with disgust."

generaliter they are), not endowed with vision until a certain age."[1]

Vision, to be sure, Shelley *was* endowed with, though of an unusual kind. The world he now entered was almost as different from his own ideal as it could be; and the force of his ever-growing disappointment led him to exaggerate all the shadows in it.

During his school years he had matured a certain faith of his own; but it was a faith that stirred him to restless energy and yearning; it did not fortify him with the power of endurance, or yield him consolation. So keen a lover of life was bound always to seek a practical realization for his dreams. His early faith was a fire within him, and not a beacon light without and beyond. He tells us himself of this schoolboy's ideal in his dedication to the *Revolt of Islam.* There he describes how his overpowering sense of the tyranny and lack of brotherhood of school life stirred him to make a vow of love and tolerance:

"I will be wise,
And just and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power; for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
Without reproach or check. . . .

"And from that hour did I with earnest thought
Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore;
Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught
I cared to learn—but from that secret store
Wrought linked armour for my soul, before
It might walk forth to war against mankind."

As he had entered Eton, he entered the world—pledged to fight it. His tyrants—and Dr. Lind seems to have been the only exception he had yet found to the tyranny of elders—were to teach him nothing. All must be done alone, by the sole aid of these "forbidden mines of lore." How was it to be done? and how was what to be done? Mankind, Shelley could see for himself, were mostly unhappy, and always, in some form, slaves. Merely to be himself just and free and mild would not help his fellowmen. That he always did try to have these qualities, and did succeed remarkably in being mild and free and generous, there are abundant testimonies from schoolfellows, and still more from the friends of his later life. But he could not settle down to the isolation and egoism of being good all by himself. He was a genuine philanthropist, and had an amazing belief in the possibilities

[1] To Hogg, May 13, '11.

of human nature. He must proselytize! But the vagueness of his own ideals gave him no foundation for propaganda. The wild career of his imagination among merely grotesque surprises of fiction and popular science, the mines of forbidden lore in fact, gave him still less.

"My son, get knowledge, and with all thy getting, get understanding." This counsel was given to Shelley by Walter Scott, with a degree of discernment almost uncanny. About this time he had sent Scott some of his juvenile effusions. Scott wrote a long and charming letter[1] to the unknown youth, from whose raw verses he had apparently been able to gather so much knowledge of his correspondent's failings that to the advice of Solomon he added his own recommendation that Shelley should choose *classical models*. Scott cannot have been aware that he was giving him the two pieces of advice that he needed most in all the world. Neither can Shelley have been aware that in disregarding them he was doing violence to his nature and his destiny.[2]

He decided that Reason was the only sure weapon against Intolerance. He soon became the advocate of one of those mechanical schemes of society in which there was no room for either Christianity or classics.

"By 1810 Shelley had begun," says Medwin, "to have a longing for authorship . . . an ambition to make a name in the world." Unfortunately Medwin also felt—similar ambitions and longings, with the result that, as soon as the production of this year, *The Wandering Jew*, obtained a very fair measure of approval on its appearance in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1831, Medwin began to feel quite sure that he had written nearly all of it. Perhaps he had, but the poem as a whole is pure Shelley Juvenilia—and by no means his worst.[3] The rapidity and melody of some of the verse is already prophetic of what is

[1] Quoted in Ingpen's *Shelley in England*, p. 82, and in *Diary of Frances, ady Shelley*, edited Edgcumbe.

[2] It is interesting to note that Keats—whose devotion to poetry, nlike Shelley's, knew no variableness, and who was so much earlier ature—gave *himself* the first of these wise counsels. "I know nothing— ave read nothing—and I mean to follow Solomon's directions, 'Get rning—get understanding.'" [To J. Taylor, April 24, 1818]. Classical dels, of course, he religiously followed.

[3] On all these points see B. Dobell's Edition of *The Wandering Jew*. bell reprints an interesting anonymous preface which appeared in *ser's Magazine* with the poem. This preface is plainly, I think, by h Hunt. My reasons I have given in a letter to the *Times Literary lement* for Dec. 25th, 1919.

good in *Queen Mab*.[1] The subject, if it can be said to have one, is a most horrid compound of the various grimaces of the School of Terror—oath breaking nuns, thunderstorms, suicides, and devils—with a vague suggestion of Shelley's immature philosophy.

This poem Shelley sent off to a Scottish firm, Ballantyne and Co., who returned it after some time with a curious reply. They said that the poem would have more chance in England among the liberal-minded English, than in bigoted Scotland. That *there* even Walter Scott was assailed on all sides "for having promulgated atheistical doctrines in *The Lady of the Lake*." Whether or no this was intended for a joke, Shelley will certainly have believed it; he may even have searched the *Lady of the Lake* for the precious gold of atheism. And the effect upon him must have been to make him regard more seriously than ever himself and his mission to stamp out this persecution of the mind.

The Wandering Jew is not a didactic poem, and it was the work of a happy period of Shelley's life, the months before he went up to Oxford, and while he was as yet not wholly obsessed by his disappointment with the world, and his fervour to reform it. But his literary studies in general were not tending to make him understand the highest sphere of poetry. He was already inclined to make of it a tool for the promotion of the Age of Reason. "You well know I am not much of a hand at *love* songs," he writes, when sending some verses to a friend just before going up to college. "You see I mingle metaphysics with even this, but perhaps in this age of philosophy that may be excused."

brother, Charles Grove, writes[1]: "Bysshe was at this time more attached to my sister Harriet than I can express. . . . In the course of that summer to the best of my recollection, a continual correspondence was going on, as, I believe, there had also been before, between Bysshe and my sister Harriet." Shelley's sister Hellen also speaks of Harriet Grove as her brother's early love. The likeness between them deeply impressed Shelley's heart: and it has been suggested that from this spring numerous descriptions in his poems of lovers "almost like to twins." But perhaps what had stirred our young philosopher above anything else was Harriet's avowal that she had once had leanings towards scepticism. Their correspondence, we gather, was voluminous and philosophic; and Shelley embarked whole-heartedly upon the first of his experiments in constructing out of deductions and inductions, premises and predications, the perfect syllogism of love.

In the autumn of 1810, he went up to University College, Oxford, and the very first night that he dined in hall he sat next to Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Hogg says that he ate little; it is apparent that he talked much, and by that midnight Hogg's "vivacious stranger" had found at last what seemed to be that worthy intellectual companionship he so much needed. Intellectually Hogg was certainly better fitted to be Shelley's intimate than anyone he had hitherto met. [illegible]

the other's fervent mind.

No letters of Shelley's written during his first term at Oxford seem to have survived. The picture that we have of him is due entirely to Hogg—and it is a most vivid and extraordinary one. So extraordinary that readers unfamiliar with Shelley from other sources suspect the biographer of romancing.[2] Hogg certainly could lie—when he liked; but there was no reason for lying in his account of this period; and to have invented such a portrait, and such anecdotes would have been beyond his power—or any man's.

The Shelley to whom Hogg introduces us, bristling with convictions, and exploding with theories though he be, is, as we should expect, still a very immature and very chaotic personage. He dogmatizes about books he has never read—like his fellows in every age—and defends tenets he does not

[1] Quoted by Dowden, vol. I, p. 48: in full by Ingpen, *Shelley in England*, p. 93

[2] Trelawny said: "Hogg has painted Shelley exactly as I knew him."

understand. A panting Reformer, he will never read a newspaper; hates history, and scorns jurisprudence. His scientific enthusiasm expresses itself mainly in noisy chemical concoctions behind barred doors: as a sober study he will not pursue it. He returns from the only lecture he ever attended, on mineralogy, bitterly complaining that it was all "about stones!—stones, stones, stones! . . . It was wonderfully tiresome."

As for any particular course of study, he does not even know that there are tutors who expect it of him. "They are very dull people here," he complains to Hogg one day, apparently after some weeks of residence. "A little man sent for me this morning, and told me in an almost inaudible whisper that I must read: 'You must read,' he said many times in his small voice. I answered that I had no objection. He persisted; so, to satisfy him, for he did not appear to believe me, I told him I had some books in my pocket, and I began to take them out. He stared at me and said that was not exactly what he meant: 'You must read Prometheus Vinctus and Demosthenes de Coronâ, and Euclid.' 'Must I read Euclid?' I asked sorrowfully. 'Yes, certainly; and when you have read the Greek works I have mentioned, you must begin Aristotle's *Ethics* . . . It is of the utmost importance to be well acquainted with Aristotle.' This he repeated so often that I was quite tired, and at last I said, 'Must I care about Aristotle? What if I do not mind Aristotle?' I then left him, for he seemed to be in great perplexity."

Read Shelley did—Hogg says that for two-thirds of the twenty-four hours he was book in hand. But always he seemed to be searching not for knowledge, but for theories and to be getting anything rather than understanding. The world—the unsatisfactory, ailing, disappointing, offending world was perpetually on his mind. What in the world was he to do with it? Something, at any rate, very drastic; something quite new. The ideas of the French Revolution, a frank upsetting of the established order—here were some possible remedies. With Hogg he studied the philosophies of Locke, Hume, and Plato. "The devotion, the reverence, the religion," says Hogg, "with which he was kindled towards all the masters of intellect cannot be described. . . ." Such "masters" as Shelley found were all in books: leaders of thought at Oxford, if there were any, turned their backs on these two gifted young men. Shelley soon contented himself with the endless opportunity provided for solitary reading; and his new friend seemed more than enough to compensate for the neglect of all the rest of the world.

Similarly Shelley alone made Oxford worth while for Hogg, who writes: "He was, indeed, a whole University in himself to me, in respect of the stimulus and incitement which his example afforded to my love of study, and he amply atoned for the disappointment I had felt on my arrival at Oxford." Hogg's disappointment was natural enough. "Not only," he writes, "had all salutary studies been long neglected at Oxford at that time and all wholesome discipline was decayed, but the splendid endowments of the University were grossly abused: the resident authorities of the college were too often men . . . destitute of every literary attainment . . . the most monstrous irregularities, open and habitual drunkenness, vice and violence, were tolerated or encouraged, with the basest [illegible]

[illegible] University. Such exclusiveness was naturally not approved of. Hogg was disliked, while Shelley was actually feared! When they [illegible] junior Fellow of t[illegible]re, for Hogg was [illegible]ut few who were not afraid of Shelley's strange and fantastic pranks, and the still stranger opinions he was known to entertain; but all acknowledged him to have been very good-humoured and of a kind disposition." [2]

But the less Shelley saw of his fellow-men, the more his natural philanthropy and great longing for a new and happier era urged him to belabour them with suggestions for their improvement. To him it was all so clear; man needed but a noble nature, and creeds, governments, marriage laws—all such toys could be swept away. Man needed but to use his reason, and the advantages of a noble nature would become clear to him also. And was there anything that seemed to stand in the light of pure Reason so much as orthodox Christianity? This, therefore, Shelley must attack. With no small relish he concocted a series of letters, provocative of discussion on religious subjects, and despatched them, as from a would-be believer, to various clerics. They, if they were conscientious

[1] These are serious accusations, but there seems to be a good deal of evidence to support Hogg in his indictment

[2] Quoted in Dowden, vol I, p 122 Cf also a letter from C Kirkpatrick Sharpe: "I send you the *Cenci*, written by that wicked wretch Shelley, and well written I remember him at Oxford mad and bad—trying to persuade people that he lived on arsenic and aqua fortis" (quoted in Ingpen's *Shelley in England*, p 193)

shepherds, eagerly rushed into the breach to save this straying sheep, when out sprang the wolf bristling with prearranged argument and logical demonstration, and tore their "evidence" to shreds.[1]

Altogether, Shelley's first term at Oxford, though occupied with anything but the ordinary pursuits of an undergraduate, was not passed in idleness, and he returned home for the Christmas vacation very enthusiastic about Hogg, and very hopeful of the World's Salvation. Propaganda was the thing—not poetry! "I have in preparation a novel," he writes to his publisher in December; "it is principally constructed to convey metaphysical and political opinions by way of conversation; it shall be sent to you as soon as completed, but it shall receive more correction than I trouble to give to wild romance and poetry."

Two days later the first really severe blow that Shelley received had fallen upon him. His sceptical opinions had become known, firstly to his father, through the publisher Stockdale, and secondly to the parents of Harriet Grove, to whom that young lady in a fit of alarm had shown Shelley's argumentative love-letters. At once the implied engagement between the cousins was put an end to by Harriet's parents, while Shelley was to some extent "reckoned an outcast" by his own family, "for my detestable principles." There is ample evidence that the effect on him was tremendous. It was probably not his disappointment in love that mattered so much, for Harriet had apparently been very doubtful on her side, and Percy's love was rather of the nature of philosophical philandering. But the abruptness of the separation—at a time when his friends were few—and the bitter demonstration that it was to him of the power of intolerance, and the brutality of convention, so disturbed his naturally unbalanced emotions that he ceased to be an enthusiast for liberty and became a *fanatic*. His feelings and his intellect were rather confused with one another in any case, as they often are in early youth, and now he plunged into a perfect chaos of reason, passion, sentimentality, and rage. He could not be a cynic or a misanthrope—for these are but forms of inactivity—and Shelley was a furnace of energy; he blazed out into a fire of fury that never wholly abated, against all forms of persecution. But it was typical of him that his hatred was directed not against

[1] "As to W.," so runs a letter to Hogg, "I wrote to him when in London by way of a gentle alternative. He promised to write to me when he had time, seemed surprised at what I said, yet directed to me as the Rev.: his amazement must be extreme."

. . . . ' Intolerance.[1]
:ak my oaths,
at I never will
forgive Intolerance . . . ; every moment shall be devoted to my object which I can spare. . . . Oh! how I wish I were the avenger!—that it were mine to crush the demon; and thus to establish for ever perfect and universal toleration.[2] I expect to gratify some of this insatiable feeling in poetry. . . ." He poured out to Hogg the whole tale of his grief at the breach with Harriet Grove; and Hogg seems to have encouraged him to brood on his morbid misery. "She is no longer mine! She abhors me as a sceptic, as what *she* was before. Oh, bigotry!"—and so on, and so forth, in almost daily epistles to the friend who was also implicated in the Shelley family's disapproval. "My mother imagines me to be in the high-road to Pandemonium." She well might have done had she seen these letters! His real disgrace with his family does not seem, however, on this occasion, to have lasted very long. He had as yet made no public avowal of heresy; and that alone would have been the unpardonable sin to Mr. Timothy. Moreover, Hogg was soon discovered to bear the hall-mark of patrician birth—his family—"that of Mr. Hogg, of Norton House, near Stockton-upon-Tees"[3]—obviously it was all mere boyish nonsense—and the wrath of the father was mitigated; Hogg was even invited to Field Place for the coming Easter vacation.

But Shelley's misery and frenzy continued, though his sister Elizabeth seems to have been the only one at home to have realized his distress and sympathized with it. "Oh, here we are in the midst of all the uncongenial jollities of Christmas, when you are compelled to contribute to the merriment of others—when you are compelled to be under the severest of all restraints, concealment of feelings pregnant enough in themselves, how terrible is your lot. . . . Thanks, *truly* thanks for opening your heart to me. . . . Dare I do the same to you? I dare not to myself. . . . I dare not even to God, whose mercy is great. My unhappiness is excessive." Shelley, as we see, is as yet no atheist—far from it; he is still a believer in "the soul of the universe, the intelligent and *necessarily* beneficent, actuating principle;—

[1] Cf. Dowden, vol. i, p. 101.

[2] It seems probabl. . . . . . . ld be read for "Intoler-
cases. See Appendix
terations of this kind
. . . made in Shelley's letters.

[3] This was enough for Mr. Shelley. Thomas Hood found merely porcine suggestions in the appellation, "Hogg of Hog's Norton," as appears from his poem entitled *Literary and Literal*.

this it is impossible not to believe in." Yet in a later letter he wishes he could quite surely believe in God—a wish instantly realized, for he hits upon a proof: "Stay! I have an idea. I think I can prove the existence of a Deity." At another time he assumes "a Revelation," and a few months after the publication of his *Necessity of Atheism* he actually went to Communion and took the sacrament.

As for his political and metaphysical doctrines, they seethe and eddy in his mind as much as his religious doubts. Now he believes in the perfectibility of man; now wretchedly he acknowledges that "human nature taken in the mass is corrupt beyond all hope." Now he will taste nothing but the cold drink of Reason; now he admits that "*faith* is one of the highest moral virtues." At one time philosophy whispers to him that it is evident "that we were not destined for misery." At another he has no hope left.

Disappointed in love himself, Shelley made great efforts to secure this happiness for Hogg. He had made up his mind that Hogg should marry Elizabeth, and Hogg was very much pleased. Not having seen her, he had to make the most of the frequent descriptions, and the fragments of poetry which her brother sent for his perusal. This strange idea seems to have been a real consolation to Shelley; and as Hogg and Elizabeth were the two dearest people in the world to him, it is not perhaps so strange as it is often thought.

At the end of January, something recovered from his heart-break, but still a storm-centre of revolt and doubt and vague determinations, he returned to Oxford. A brief few weeks were spent in the usual avid reading, in the preparing of booby-trap letters to clergymen, and efforts in every direction to encourage by word and deed—letters and money—the cause of "Liberty." The opportunity for reading and thinking that Oxford provided was becoming more and more valued by him, and probably would have contributed greatly to the settling of his volcanic mind; but the period of twenty minutes during which his little pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* reposed upon the counter of a book-shop put an end to it all, and by the close of March Shelley and Hogg were expelled.[1] Here was the second blow. What hope for the young fanatic now? Kings and priests, tyranny and superstition—were they, after all, such mere shadows and bugbears? They had deprived him of his young love; spoiled his relations with his home, and

[1] Shelley was expelled mainly by the instrumentality of the (future) Professor of Poetry! (See Shelley's letter to Godwin, January 10, 1812; and Ingpen, *Shelley in England*, p. 196.)

now driven him, disgraced and an outcast, from the valued seclusion of University life. The nineteenth century had dawned to be sure, but Shelley saw, across lands that should have felt the sunrise, the far-thrown shadow of an Inquisition.

Poor Mr. Timothy was in a terrible state. Bysshe must apologize to the Fellows of his college; he must go home and place himself under a tutor; he must cease "for some considerable time" all communications with Hogg. Shelley could not apologize for an opinion; and Hogg was more endeared to him than ever by his chivalrous behaviour in sharing his friend's penalty. A *rapprochement* was therefore not effected, though he wrote his father a courteous and conciliatory letter claiming that it was not profligacy that had led him to disbelieve in the Scriptures. He took rooms in London with Hogg. "These youngsters must be parted, and the fathers must exert themselves," wrote Mr. Timothy to Mr. Hogg, senior. "Paley's *Natural Theology* I shall recommend my young man to read. . . . I shall read it with him." The [illegible] ne up to town, and spent [illegible] when with tears, oaths, [illegible] . out of 'Palleys' book this morning; but 'Palley originally had them from me," he attempted to convince the young men of the existence of a Deity, and succeeded in impressing Hogg with the extraordinary resemblance between Mr. Timothy Shelley and the Jehovah of the Jews.[1]

[illegible] provoking the father's false pride into an attitude of tyrannous intransigence, and insulting Shelley himself into a passion of anger. Shelley was not to be allowed to choose his own profession in life; he was not to see his sisters. Knowing only too well that it was not the opinions of Percy Bysshe Shelley, but those of the tenant-in-tail of a big estate that were causing so much consternation to father, grandfather, cousins, and lawyers,[2] Shelley offered to resign his future fortune in favour of his mother and sisters and content himself with an annuity of £100 a year. As it happened that he was legally unable to

[1] See Hogg, chap. ix.

[2] To Godwin, January 16, 1812: "It is probable that my father has *acted* for my welfare, [illegible] allow me to suppose [illegible] considerations of birt[illegible] me."

do so, this proposal shocked his family most of all. Whitton could not bring himself to mention a proposal of such "indecency," while Mr. Timothy exclaimed in a letter to Whitton: "To cast off all thoughts of his Maker, to abandon his parents, to wish to relinquish his fortune, and to court persecution, all seems to arise from the same source. . . . He wishes to become what he would term a martyr to his sentiments—nor do I believe he would feel the horrors of being drawn upon a hurdle, or the shame of being whirl'd in the pillory." It is a typical attitude—typical of the cynical elder, of blind materialism and cruel stupidity; typical of the age when mad George and bad George defiled the earth between them. To Shelley persecution was intensely, terribly, painful; to the end of his life the ill-opinions of his fellow-men cut not his vanity, but his heart. He had written to a friend from Eton: "I act unlike every other mortal enough in all conscience, without seeking for more quixotish adventures." But quixotish adventures for ever attended him, and brought calumny in their wake. When he was expelled from Oxford he went to his friend Halliday with the words: "Halliday, I am come to say good-bye to you, if you are not afraid to be seen with me!" The expulsion from Oxford—the public disgrace and hostility it involved—had shocked and agitated Shelley, as Hogg says, cruelly. And now, so far from wanting to abandon his parents, he was longing to return home.

"I hope young Hogg has left your son," was the pious wish of Whitton, "as he will see by it how unsteady the mind is in its first purposes." Shelley, out of favour with his love, his family, his college, and the world, did not need to be abandoned by Hogg also to learn the inconstancy of mankind. And *as yet* Hogg remained true to him, though he was soon obliged to leave London and take up his work at a lawyer's office in York. "I cannot endure the horror, the evil, which comes to *self* in solitude," wrote poor Shelley from his London lodgings. "I long for the moment to see my sisters." But even Elizabeth seemed to be estranged from him, and on April 28, Mr. Timothy returned home, having come to the stern, irrevocable, last decision—to the immortal decision, of "leaving the young man to his own imagination."[1]

"Had he now behaved himself pardonably in the eyes of the conventional in those days," says Leigh Hunt, "Shelley would have gone to London with the resolution of sowing his wild oats and becoming a decent member of society—that is to say, he would have seduced a few maid-servants, or at least haunted

[1] See Ingpen: *Shelley in England*, p. 253 *seq.*, and p. 262 (note).

the lobbies of the theatre, and then bestowed the remnant of his constitution upon some young lady of his own rank in life, and settled into a proper Church and King man of the old leaven, perhaps a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. . . . Alas! Shelley did not do so; and bitterly had he to repent, not that he did not do it, but that he married, while yet a stripling, and that the wife whom he took was not of a nature to appreciate his understanding, or perhaps to come from contact with it uninjured in what she had of her own."

It was during these weeks of exile in London that Shelley began to like his sister's schoolfellow, the beautiful Harriet Westbrook—namesake of his first love; and, like his first love, open to the whisperings of scepticism. It was during these weeks that he began to try desperately hard to like her sister, Eliza. Something of the unimaginable odiousness of Eliza Westbrook can be gathered from the fact that though she tried and tried to please Shelley, who on every other occasion was instantly moved by the least show of kindness, she failed not merely to please him, but to take him in—"the sister is too civil by half. She began talking about l'Amour" (April 28, 1811). May 8, 1811: "I spend most of my time at Miss Westbrook's. I really now consider her as amiable, not perhaps in a high degree, but perhaps she is." May 19, 1811: "Miss Westbrook, the elder, I have heard from to-day. She improves upon acquaintance; or is it only when contrasted with surrounding indifference and degradation?" Can we wonder that by March 16, 1814, we find him writing, "Eliza is still with us—not here!—but will be with me when the infinite malice of destiny forces me to depart. I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflowings of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable wretch."

No, Eliza never quite took Shelley in; but she managed to secure him; a seemingly excellent brother-in-law, promising to be heir to thousands. And here it was that Eliza was taken in; and she never forgave it.

In May, 1811, Shelley at last got home, having come to an agreement with his father by which he received an income of £200 a year and the right to live where he chose. His sister Elizabeth treated him with more cordiality than he had dared to expect; his mother consoled him with the remark. "If a man is a good man, philosopher or Christian, he will do very well in whatever future state awaits us." "This I call liberality!" cried the would-be devoted son. Unfortunately it was the kind of liberality that was as useless to Shelley as prejudice; he seemed to find nothing in the views of his family but absen-

of belief in anything except "the opinion of the world." "The discanonization of this saint of theirs is impossible until something more worthy of devotion is pointed out; but where eyes are shut, nothing can be seen! They would ask, are we wrong to regard the opinion of the world—what would compensate us for the loss of it? Good heavens! What a question! It is not to be answered in a word! So I have but little of their confidence: the confidence of my sister even is diminished; that confidence once so unbounded."[1] And by June 25, he is "a perfect hermit: not a being to speak with! I sometimes exchange a word with my mother on the subject of the weather, upon which she is irresistibly eloquent; otherwise all is deep silence! I wander about this place, walking all over the grounds, with no particular object in view"—except, we are not surprised to discover, "writing sometimes to Miss Westbrooks."

Shelley's dear scheme of making a true brother of Hogg by uniting him to Elizabeth was also coming to naught. The obstacles were certainly considerable. Elizabeth seemed to be terribly changed; from despising the world she had come to bow before it. Percy, on the other hand, had come to believe (though Hogg did not agree with him) that marriage was "the most horrible of all the means which the world has had recourse to to bind the noble to itself. . . ." Yet here was Elizabeth sneering at her brother's unconventional opinions, and wholly fascinated by what he describes as "the glittering tinsel ornament of anticipated matrimonialism"; and that, although Godwin had said that marriage is "hateful, detestable."

Left now with only one friend in the world, Shelley had made of *Political Justice* his father and mother. The following year he was to write to Godwin in these words: "It is now a period of more than two years since first I saw your inestimable book on *Political Justice*. It opened to my mind fresh and more extensive views; it materially influenced my character, and I rose from its perusal a wiser and a better man. I was no longer the votary of romance; till then I had existed in an ideal world—now I found that in this universe of ours was enough to excite the interest of the heart, enough to employ the discussions of reason. I beheld, in short, that I had duties to perform."[2] This is how it seemed to Shelley in 1812; to us it is very clear that to deprive a Shelley of his existence in

[1] Ingpen, vol. i, May 17, 1811.

[2] It was while Shelley was at Eton that he first set eyes on *Political Justice*, but he did not really study it till probably his second term at Oxford.

an ideal world was by no means to make of him a wiser and a better man. Too clear is it that the Shelley of the ensuing four years was anything but a wise man, while the duties he elected to perform seemed fated, wherever he went, to produce the greatest possible discomfort of the greatest number.

But Godwin is only partially to blame for this. It has been said that Shelley was a garden that Godwin laid waste.[1] It would be truer to describe him as a garden already devastated by various blights in early life, and which Godwin covered with cabbages. And better the voice of Godwin in the garden than the confusion that would otherwise have reigned there. Cold and mechanical though they seem to us, the theories of Godwin were, after all, *idealistic.* In an age when men were abnormally disappointed in themselves and unhappy, they held out the hope that Man might be both good and glad. Shelley's hungry idealism seized on these doctrines as a new religion; and though they confirmed him in his rejection of the imaginative world, and urged him on to a kind of practical life for which he was quite unfitted, they did, at any rate, occupy his mind and save it from chaotic fanaticism. The political was almost the only channel left for his feelings. "In *theology* . . . ," he wrote, "I advance with caution and circumspection . . . but in politics . . . *here* I am enthusiastic."[2] "Were I a moral legislator, I would propose to my followers that they should [illegible] . . .

[illegible] proxi-

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less, homeless, disgraced boy, without a profession, without power, without money. Political enthusiasm was not enough, and his unacted desires were breeding pestilences. So he wrote sentimental letters about his sister to Hogg; and sentimental letters about philosophy to Elizabeth Hitchener, a schoolmistress ten years his senior whom he had met at his uncle's house in Sussex; and sentimental verses, "a strange *mélange* of maddened stuff," by the light of the midnight moon.

The Shelley of the Christmas heart-break, of the Easter expulsion, of the summer elopement; the gushing, infatuated devotee and subsequent sputtering defamer of Elizabeth Hitchener; the effusive, self-deceiving Shelley, with his impassioned insincerity and futile energies—there is no denying him; he is there before our eyes. To attempt to con-

[1] Brailsford: *Shelley, Godwin, and their Circle.*
[2] June 25, 1811.

ceal him is vain, since he confesses himself in a hundred letters. This is the Shelley that certain of his gentler critics would fain have looked away from, and instead have been mesmerized into seeing in the most lurid colours. This is he who is perpetually presented to us by writers as "Shelley the Man," or "The Real Shelley"—and he is not the man at all, but the misguided and misguiding youth, blundering upon the stage of unkind circumstance, and betraying equally in his melodramatic gestures and his desperate and feverish earnestness, that he has not got his rôle by heart.[1]

Belief, Shelley had once written to his father,[2] *is not voluntary; it is not an action but a passion of the mind.* And this was a piece of wisdom that he seems to have forgotten when he forced himself to make a Faith of Reason.

The first of his letters to Elizabeth Hitchener opens with the statement that he has now become an undivided votary of reason. He proceeds to attempt to shake her belief in a "Deity of Virtue"; a "personification beautiful in poetry, but inadmissible in reasoning." And he concludes a long letter with the sudden remark: "Yet I forgot . . . I intended to mention to you something essential. I recommend reason. Why? Is it because, since I have devoted myself unreservedly to its influencing, I have never felt *happiness*? I have rejected all fancy, all imagination. I find that all pleasure resulting to self is thereby annihilated. I am led into this egotism, that you may be clearly aware of the nature of reason, as it affects me."

Amidst the endless flow of his epistolary discussions there is frequent reference to the joylessness resulting from this supposed subjection to reason.[3] Of the habit of analysing our own thoughts he writes:

"It is this then against which I intended to caution you, this is the tree of which it is dangerous to eat, but which I

[1] To E.H., January 2, 1812: "Your eloquence comes from the soul. It has the impassionateness of nature. I sometimes doubt the source of mine, and suspect the genuineness of my sincerity." Even at this period Shelley's persecuted genius sometimes told him the truth!

[2] February 8, 1811.

[3] The extent to which this obsession interfered both with Shelley's happiness and his poetical development has not been fully realized by his critics, with the exception, I find, of M. Koszul, the first half of whose book *La Jeunesse de Shelley* is excellent on this period of Shelley's life. Only those who can endure to see Shelley given the rôle of a philanderer from the Pays de Tendre should read the second half. The same unfortunate tendency to misrepresent and vulgarize the poet is very marked in M. Maurois' witty but partly fictitious study *Ariel*, which has appeared while the present work was in the press.

have fed upon to satiety. . . . We look around us . . . we find that we exist, we find ourselves reasoning upon the mystery which involves our being . . . we see virtue and vice, we see light and darkness, each is separate, distinct; the line which divides them is glaringly perceptible; yet how racking it is to the soul, when inquiring into its own operations, to find that perfect virtue is very far from attainable, to find reason tainted by feeling, to see the mind, when analysed, exhibit a picture of irreconcilable inconsistencies, even when perhaps a moment before it imagined that it had grasped the fleeting phantom of virtue."[1]

And when in the following month of July he goes to spend some weeks with cousins at Rhayader, in Wales, it is strange indeed to find the once impassioned lover of beauty writing: "Nature is here marked with the most impressive characters of loveliness and grandeur, once I was tremendously alive to tones and scenes . . . the habit of analysing feelings I fear does not agree with this."

The inevitable result of Shelley's unnatural idolatry of reason was soon seen in the unreasonableness of his acts. Little Harriet Westbrook, aged not quite seventeen, being teased and cold-shouldered at school for the sceptical opinions she imagined herself—on Shelley's recommendation—to hold, suddenly felt prompted to run away. She offered to run away with Shelley, aged not quite nineteen.

His solitude in Wales was suddenly broken in upon by this most romantic suggestion. The folly of a philosopher and the vanity of little more than a schoolboy made hesitation impossible. "She has thrown herself on *my* protection," he writes to Hogg (on August 3, 1811). "I set off for London on Monday. How flattering a distinction! I am thinking of ten million things at once. . . . Gratitude and admiration all demand that I should love her *for ever*." Reason, in fact, was to make a success of the match. In just one thing, on the threshold of the greatest of his errors, reason guided Shelley well. Hysterical denouncer of marriage though he had been, the arguments of Hogg and his own reflection soon persuaded him that for Harriet's sake he must let that "amiable beloved female" submit to the degradation of the Marriage Service.

[1] I print this letter as it is printed in Mr Ingpen's edition I am unable to explain why so many of the letters are there given with gaps that occasionally seem to reduce whole passages to nonsense It is not entirely due, at any rate, to any reservations on the part of the Shelley family, for Mr. Ingpen omits an important passage in one of the later letters which had been published in several other places

Because he did so, he became three years later, when he left her, a reviled and detested outcast of society. Yet in those days of anguished struggle his own heart must have told him that it was better to leave Harriet as he was leaving her, than to have taken her as he might have taken her.

Within a week of the letter to Hogg just quoted he resumed his philosophical epistles to Miss Hitchener, merely remarking, without giving her further information, that "my engagements have hindered much devotion of time to a consideration of the subject of our discussion." Harriet was still hesitating, so her knight, relieved of the necessity of attending to the practical arrangements of an elopement, seized the opportunity to continue his pursuit of Truth. This was again interrupted, however, a fortnight later, by Harriet's making up her mind, and posting off with Shelley to Edinburgh, where the two were irregularly and abruptly married. Ten days later, Shelley is again writing to Miss Hitchener, trying to reconcile her and himself to his extraordinary conduct and begging her to come and stay with them. His letters to this particular correspondent are in many parts unpleasant reading, both because of the utter lack of self-knowledge and of reserve displayed by the writer, and also because only too much is apparent of the silliness and vanity with which a woman ten years his senior was encouraging his error, until finally she abandoned both her religion and her profession in response to his persuasions.

From this time, until Shelley had swept away all the relics of his old life and started afresh, there is an atmosphere of queerness about everything that he does, all that he says, all that happens to him. His friends behave queerly to him and he to them; he is nearly assassinated, nearly drowned, nearly imprisoned; his public activities, when not utterly childlike, are laughably quixotic and unsuccessful. He is genius out of its element, undisciplined and misused—genius floundering and frustrated.

Among these figures and events of mixed burlesque and nightmare, Harriet with her lovely rosy cheeks and happy casual good-nature seems the only human and healthy presence. But Shelley was most manifestly not in love with Harriet; he gradually became fondly, even dependently, attached to her, but he had not felt, and did not even suspect the existence of, such power of love as that which swept him away three years later. If he had felt deeply about Harriet, he could not possibly have written to Miss Hitchener within a few weeks of his marriage to explain his action; relating that Harriet had declared her love for him and that "it was impossible to avoid

being much affected"; vowing that Miss Hitchener is the Sister of his soul—that she is still "dearest" to him; and begging her to assist him to mould Harriet, "a really noble soul, into all that can make its nobleness useful and lovely."[1]

For a time the two young things got along very happily—feeding, as Hogg tells us of the following year, mostly on sweetstuff and buns; planning to reform the world, and roaming about the country. When they were staying at Keswick in the winter of this year (1811), a member of the Southey family asked whether the garden had been let with their part of the house. "Oh no," replied Mrs. Shelley. "The garden is not ours; but then, you know, the people let us run about in it, whenever Percy and I are tired of sitting in the house."

The first queer thing to happen, and it was a very queer thing, and happened very soon, was that when Shelley moved from Edinburgh to York in order to be near Hogg, Hogg began to make love to Harriet. Shelley was away at the time, attempting to get money out of his father, who was more enraged than ever to find that his son, despite his generous offer, had preferred to make a *mésalliance*. When Hogg confessed his feelings, Harriet, very naturally, sent for Eliza—and Eliza most unfortunately came—and came to stay. When Shelley returned, he discovered that the only friend remaining to him out of the upheavals of the last year, his dearest and most reverenced friend, had deliberately set out to betray him. And Shelley behaved very queerly—with a magnanimity that is almost incomprehensible even when we remember that he was far more passionately fond of Hogg than of Harriet. Hogg himself confessed the truth. "We walked out to the fields beyond York," Shelley tells Miss Hitchener. "I desired to know fully the account of this affair. I heard it *from him*, and I believe he was sincere. All I can recollect of that terrible day was that I pardoned him, freely, fully pardoned him. . . . He said little; he was pale, terror-struck, remorseful. . . ." Not only does Shelley pardon Hogg in this way, but he obviously regards it as the natural course. "You can conjecture," he says, "that my letters to him will be neither infrequent nor short." And in the same

[1] It would hardly be necessary to point out the obvious deduction from even one of these disloyalties, had it not been repeatedly claimed by Shelley's advocates that he passionately loved Harriet, and continued to do so until she began to be cold to him. Selfish and altered behaviour on Harriet's part certainly hurried on the inevitable end; but even if she had remained as docile and devoted as ever, Shelley was bound to find out eventually that this childish marriage had been no true marriage at all.

Because he did so, he became three years later, when he left her, a reviled and detested outcast of society. Yet in those days of anguished struggle his own heart must have told him that it was better to leave Harriet as he was leaving her, than to have taken her as he might have taken her.

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letter he writes: "Never could you conceive, never having experienced it, that resistless and pathetic eloquence of his, never the illumination of that countenance, on which I have sometimes gazed till I fancied the world could be reformed by gazing too."[1] . . . "It could not be a fall never to rise again. It shall not be if I can retrieve it." To Hogg himself he pours out his heart, and at first can utter hardly a word of reproach. Immediately after the disclosure he had set out with Eliza and Harriet for Keswick, whence he writes at once to Hogg: "You were surprised at our sudden departure; I have arrived at this place after some days of incessant travelling, which has left me no leisure to write to you at length. To-morrow you will hear more." "With real, true interest, I constantly think of you, believe me, my friend, so sincerely am I attached to you. I can never forget you."[2] He is so ready to believe that his friend must have been the victim of some strange delusion which could never return again, that he even urges him to join them at Keswick. "I have ever esteemed you as a superior being, and taken you for one who was to give laws to us poor beings who grovel beneath. . . . Will you share my fortunes, enter into my schemes, love me as I love you, be inseparable, as once I fondly hoped we were?" "This is not all past like a dream of the sick man, which leaves but bitterness—a fleeting vision. Oh, how I have loved you! I was even ashamed to tell you how!"

"Consider," he writes, "what havoc one year, the last year of our lives, has made in memory." Havoc, indeed—and when we read the strange, violent, forgiving, impassioned letters that Shelley wrote to the friend who was so unworthy of him, we feel that here was the first real heart-break that he suffered, and here was the greatest of all the havoc that had yet befallen him. He never had so close a friend again; for many years no man became really intimate with him, and his hunger for sympathy and love was therefore all the greater.

For weeks he tried to build up again his faith in Hogg, and by sheer vehemence of sincerity and affection to get beyond all human reserves, and speak to whatever was noble in his friend's inmost soul. . . . "You are, you *shall* be my bosom friend. You have been so but in one instance, and there you have deceived yourself. Still let us continue what we have ever been. I will remain unchanged, so *shall* you *hereafter*. Let us forget this affair, let us erase from the memory that ever it had being." . . . "You say you fear that you have lost my good opinion. 'Good opinion' is very comprehensive,

[1] November 8, 1811. [2] November 6, 1811.

certainly. I no longer estimate your powers of resisting passion so highly as once I did. Certainly, I no longer consider your reason as superior to the sophistry of feeling, as once it was. How can I?" "I admit the distinction which you make between mistake and crime. I heartily acquit you of the latter. Yet how great has been your mistake. I said I thought you were insincere—true. I do not wonder that you should shudder at the accusation. It appears to me perfectly natural that you should at the same time be disguising, veiling, palliating; you should think yourself the pattern of disinterestedness, which once you were, which once I hope again to behold you. I said you were insincere. I said so because I thought so. I still think so; but you are imposed upon by feeling the contamination of falsehood is far, far from you. One expression in your long letter, your last letter, convinces me that you are still enthralled by feeling. It is merely an instance. 'I must, I will convince you,' etc. 'I must—or, the alternative is terrible but decided. You shall believe,' etc., 'or, when *too late*, you shall feel.' This gives me pain. This proves to me that, so far from being now under the guidance of reason, you wish to enforce my belief in you by an act, which itself is inadequate to the excitement of any belief, but that of *your* selfishness, or to *revenge* my want of it by this very act, which you know would embitter my existence. Else what means 'you *shall* feel *when too late*'?"

Quick to feel the baseness of this threat of Hogg's to commit suicide, he is still slow to disbelieve in his friend's love for him. But at last he was forced to see that, weighed in the balance with Hogg's desire to gratify a passion, he was as chaff. "In answer to a letter," he tells Miss Hitchener, "in which I strongly insisted on the criminality of exposing himself to the inroads of a passion which he had proved himself unequal to control, and endangering Harriet's happiness, he has talked of my '*consistency* in despising religion, despising duelling, and despising sincere friendship'—with some hints as to duelling to induce me to meet him in that manner. I have answered his letter, in which I have said I shall not fight a duel with him, whatever he may say or do; that I have no right either to expose my own life or take his—in addition to the wish which I have, from various motives, to prolong my existence. Nor do I think that his life is a fair exchange for mine, since I have acted up to my principles, and he has denied his, and acted inconsistently with any morality whatsoever. That if he would show how I had wronged him, I would repair it to the uttermost mite; but I would not fight a duel."

certainly. I no longer estimate your powers of resisting passion so highly as once I did. Certainly, I no longer consider your reason as superior to the sophistry of feeling, as once it was. How can I?" "I admit the distinction which you make between mistake and crime. I heartily acquit you of the latter. Yet how great has been your mistake. I said I thought you were insincere—true. I do not wonder that you should shudder at the accusation. I [illegible] that you should at the s[illegible] palliating; you should thir[illegible] terestedness, which once you were, which once I hope again to behold you. I said you were insincere. I said so because I thought so. I still think so; but you are imposed upon by feeling the contamination of falsehood is far, far from you. One expression in your long letter, your last letter, convinces me that you are still enthralled by feeling. It is merely an instance. 'I must,' I will convince you,' etc. 'I must—or, the alternative is terrible but decided. You shall believe,' etc., 'or, when *too late*, you shall feel.' This gives me pain. This proves to me that, so far from being now under the guidance of reason, you wish to enforce my belief in you by an act, which itself is inadequate to the excitement of any belief, but that of *your* selfishness, or to *revenge* my want of it by this very act, which you know would embitter my existence. Else what means 'you *shall* feel *when too late*'?"

Quick to feel the baseness of this threat of Hogg's to commit suicide, he is still slow to disbelieve in his friend's love for him. But at last he was forced to see that, weighed in the balance with Hogg's desire to gratify a passion, he was as chaff. "In answer to a letter," he tells Miss Hitchener, "in which I strongly insisted on the criminality of exposing himself to the inroads of a passion which he had proved himself unequal to [illegible] talked of [illegible] lling, and [illegible] o duelling to induce me to meet him in that manner. I have answered his letter, in which I have said I shall not fight a duel with him, whatever he may say or do; that I have no right either to expose my own life or take his—in addition to the wish which I have, from various motives, to prolong my existence. Nor do I think that his life is a fair exchange for mine, since I have acted up to my principles, and he has denied his, and acted inconsistently with any morality whatsoever. That if he would show how I had wronged him, I would repair it to the uttermost mite; but I would not fight a duel."

After this he wrote to Hogg no more.

"High powers," he had lamented, "appear but to present opportunities for occasioning superior misery."

However inconstant in his more excitable feelings, Shelley was extraordinarily constant in his affections. His family only succeeded in throwing him off by relegating their correspondence with him to an unmannerly and vindictive attorney. And his ineradicable love for Hogg grew up again, though shorn of all its faith and joy.[1] A year later, at the end of 1812, he called on Hogg in London, and a reconciliation was effected. Whether, after what had passed, Hogg's visits gave any pleasure to Shelley and Harriet is very doubtful.[2] Hogg complains in his life (in which, needless to say, no hint of any serious grounds of quarrel between himself and Shelley occurs) that when he used to call on the Shelleys, Harriet, who was "fonder than ever of reading aloud," would take up "the first book that came to hand as soon as I entered the room, and the reading commenced." He must have known the reason, though he never supposed his readers would know it; and he can hardly, without a little rueful private amusement, have described the scene when once Shelley had had to go out after dinner, "leaving me alone with Harriet. We sat and conversed for a while; she probably was waiting for the moment when with a decent regard for the paramount duty of digestion she might begin to read aloud." She probably was.

Hogg was invited to visit the Shelleys in Wales; the visit was postponed because Shelley had had a fright from a mysterious house-breaker, and was leaving for Dublin. And when he was asked to visit them in Dublin he arrived after a long and uncomfortable journey to find that they had left for Killarney—too far for him to follow them. This, however, may have meant nothing, for Shelley once treated his revered Godwin in a manner not so very different. In the year 1820 Shelley wrote to Hogg inviting him to join his second wife Mary and himself in Italy. "There is no person," he said, "for whom I feel so high an esteem and value as for you, or from whom I expected to receive so great a portion of the happiness of life; there is none of whose society I have been

[1] In their Oxford days Shelley had written to Hogg, "I am sorry to see that you even remotely suspected me of being offended with you. How I wish that I could persuade you that it is impossible." Many people say these things to their friends—Shelley spoke the truth.

[2] They never showed him their child Ianthe, as Hogg himself relates.

so frequently deprived by the unfortunate and almost inexplicable complexity of my situation." There is forgiveness here; there may also be reproach; there is certainly (as in most letters to Hogg subsequent to December, 1811) reserve: reserve of which Hogg himself seems most unjustifiably to have complained.[1] But then the forfeiture of Shelley's confiding love was probably the biggest tragedy in Hogg's life.

During the weeks that he was at Keswick, Shelley, as might be supposed, was very short of money. His father and grandfather had made the "insultingly hateful" proposal that he should receive £2,000 a year on the condition that he would entail the estate on his eldest son, "who might," cries his potential father, "instead of being the benefactor of mankind, be its bane." Shelley indignantly refused, for "my principles have induced me to regard the law of primogeniture an evil of primary magnitude. My father's notions of family honour are incoincident with my knowledge of public good."[2] Renewed efforts at reconciliation between Shelley and his family were thus arrested; and with an income of £400 (£200 from Mr. Timothy and £200 from Mr. Westbrook) Shelley set out to reform the world.

Outcast and friendless as he was, he felt the need to provide himself with a guide to direct his energies, so without further formality, on January 3, 1812, he wrote to inform Godwin of the inconceivable emotions with which he had learned that Godwin was still alive. "I had enrolled your name in the list of the honourable dead. It is not so; you still live, and, I firmly believe, are still planning the welfare of human kind." Godwin was not altogether pleased with this young man's discovery that he was still alive; as a matter of fact, he was only fifty-five. He replied briefly, on the ground that his "avocations" were important, and that the "generalizing character" of the stranger's letter rendered it deficient in interest. Certainly Shelley's description of himself as one animated by the desire for universal happiness was of the vaguest. He hastened to fill in the portrait, and among other details mentioned that he was heir to £6,000 a year. And thereupon Godwin wrote "a prompt and kind answer," and expressed a deep and earnest interest in the welfare of his young admirer, at the same time recommending him to keep on good terms with his father.

While in Cumberland, Shelley also met Southey, hitherto his

[1] See Hogg's *Life*, last chapter.
[2] To Godwin, January 10, 1812.

favourite contemporary poet. Southey treated him very kindly, but did him the injury of adding one more to his disillusionments. Shelley, on the other hand, seems to have wakened in Southey a memory of something lost. "Here is a man at Keswick," he wrote, "who acts upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1794." But he hastens to lay the ghost with the remark: "I dare say it will not be very long before I shall succeed in convincing him that he may be a true philosopher, and do a great deal of good, with £6,000 a year. . . . God help us! the world wants mending, though he did not set about it exactly in the right way." Southey was thirty-seven and Shelley was nineteen—and Southey thought himself in a position to teach Shelley the right way. At first they seemed to agree most excellently: the older told the younger poet that he also believed in liberty and equality; that he also looked forward to "a state where all shall be perfected, and matter become subjected to the omnipotence of mind"; that he also disbelieved in the Trinity and thought "Jesus Christ stood precisely in the same relation to God as himself."[1]

But it was the old story; the story which is repeated over and over again in the attitude of at least half the world to the ideals of Shelley himself. "My dear boy," says the elder man to the enthusiastic youth, "I sympathize with all these ideas of yours; I agree with you heartily. I used to talk just as you do when I was young; there is nothing new to me in this. *But*—'I am now an advocate for existing establishments.[2] I have a large family to support;[3] and so I hate the Irish, and speak against Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform;[4] for expediency is, after all, the most important thing in politics;[5] and when you are as old as I am you will think with me;[6] so long live the Church,[7] and here's to the

[1] See Shelley's letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, December 26, 1811.

[2] See Shelley to Elizabeth Hitchener, December 26, 1811: "But he (Southey) is now an advocate of existing establishments."

[3] Shelley to Elizabeth Hitchener, January 2, 1812: "I am not sure that Southey is *quite* uninfluenced by venality. . . . His writings are the sole support of a numerous family."

[4] To Elizabeth Hitchener, December 26, 1811: "Southey hates the Irish, and speaks against Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform."

[5] To Elizabeth Hitchener, January 7, 1812: "Southey says expediency ought to be made the ground of politics, but not of morals."

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] To Elizabeth Hitchener, December 15, 1811: "The Church of England, its Hell and all, has become the subject of his panegyric."

'transcendent virtues' of 'the best Monarch that ever adorned a throne.'[1] Pray take a buttered muffin."[2]

Less than two years later Southey had become Poet Laureate and abandoned all the causes which he had once enthusiastically supported. He had also embraced the prevailing view of Shelley, and soon came to regard his poems as "monstrous in their kind, and pernicious in their tendency," and himself as "the blackest of villains."[3]

Shelley was not long at Keswick before he discovered that Southey was no longer the fine character he once had been. "His mind is terribly narrow compared to it. *Once* he *was* this character—everything you can conceive of practised virtue. Now he is corrupted by the world, contaminated by Custom. It rends my heart when I think what he might have been! Wordsworth and Coleridge I have yet to see."

Unfortunately he never saw either of them: a fact which Coleridge was generous enough to regret. "Now—the very reverse of what would have been the case in ninety-nine instances out of a hundred," he later wrote to a friend, "I *might* have been of use to him, and Southey could not; for I should have sympathized with his poetics, metaphysical reveries, and [illegible] Southey, and [illegible] His discussions [illegible] ould not have scared *me*; for *me* it would have been a semi-transparent larva, soon to be sloughed and through which I should have seen the true image—the final metamorphosis. Besides, I have ever thought that sort of Atheism the next best religion to Christianity. . . ."

To take this tolerant view, it was necessary to have that vein of mysticism which both Shelley and Coleridge possessed, but which Shelley for the time had stifled. In later life he could regard Christianity as at least the next best thing to his kind of atheism. In 1812, as the world he was struggling with cared only for the labels on its public institutions, nothing for their true significance, he had fallen into the error of seeing these not as they had been or might be, but as his age had

[1] To Elizabeth Hitchener, January 20, 1812: See article of Southey's in *Edinburgh Annual Register*.

[2] This was the only advice of Southey's that Shelley seems ever to have taken. Hogg, chap. xiv, describes Shelley's unspeakable horror at seeing Southey devour plates of buttered teacakes—to the charms of which he afterwards himself succumbed, and came to think as Southey did.

[3] See Shelley to Hunt, December 22, 1818.

branded them. He attacked Christianity as if it were a synonym for hypocrisy and persecution, and could be smashed to pieces by the first onslaught of Reason; while he banished his "poetics and metaphysical reveries" to the corners of his private correspondence. Here Reason was occasionally bundled unceremoniously out of her throne, and dreams of the perfect state and immortality were allowed to raise their heads. "Every day makes me feel more keenly that our being is eternal. Every day brings the conviction how futile, how inadequate, are all reasonings to demonstrate it." "I *will* live beyond this life." Even Poetry dared to rebel for a moment against her total subjection to propaganda, though still with half an eye to the practical. "I have now, my dear friend," he writes to Miss Hitchener, from Keswick, "in contemplation a Poem. I intend it to be by anticipation a picture of the manners, simplicity, and delights of a perfect state of society, though still earthly. Will you assist me? I only thought of it last night. I design to accomplish it and publish. After I shall draw a picture of Heaven."

The very mention of themes destined to be so great an inspiration to the Shelley of the future makes us wonder if at last Poetry is to be allowed an entry, even though it was but "last night" that she was noticed waiting on the doorstep. We find that almost by the morrow she is brushed aside—"I do not proceed with my poem; the subject is not *now* to my mind." It is politics again, impatience of existing evils, and faith in his own practical remedies, that have taken possession of his thoughts. A rebellion in Mexico, or the state of Ireland, on such subjects he can compose a few stiff verses. "On these topics," he says, "I find that I sometimes can write poetry when I feel—such as it is." [1] Shelley was by this time a fairly sound judge of political affairs, so long as he remained a passive spectator. He was no mere impatient revolutionary. "Popular insurrections and revolutions I look upon with discountenance. *If such things must be,* I will take the side of the People; but my reasonings shall endeavour to ward it from the hearts of the Rulers of the Earth, deeply as I detest them." . . . "There is a beautiful harmony between the good of the State and the moral freedom and dignity of the individual."

As all this was not mere eloquence with Shelley, he soon felt himself compelled to act. And by the middle of January, 1812, he had determined, as he tells Godwin, to leave Keswick and go to Ireland, "principally to *forward as much as we can*

[1] February 14, 1812.

the Catholic Emancipation." Godwin protested: not from the fear that this young friend of his, with his nineteen years and his £100,[1] was going to make a fool of himself, but for fear that in Shelley's *Address to the Irish*, the sentence, "I have come to this country to spare no pains where expenditure may purchase you real benefit," might mean that his valuable young admirer was going to spend money on the Irish. Shelley explained that he only meant "expenditure in a moral sense." [2] And then Godwin had begun to be anxious lest Shelley was "preparing a scene of blood."

Shelley, however, is doing nothing of the sort; he merely intends to devote himself "to forwarding the great ends of virtue and happiness in Ireland." And so far from losing money there, he is confident that he will make it. He is going [illegible] *to the Irish*, which is to be "printed very cheap," partly at the writer's expense. This last, he thinks, will be irresistible, for not only is it "intended to familiarize to uneducated apprehensions ideas of liberty, benevolence, *peace*, and toleration," but is also "*secretly* intended . . . to shake Catholicism on its basis."

Stocked with such promising ammunition, on February 3 Shelley, Eliza and Harriet set sail for Ireland. As soon as he arrived in Dublin (after a perilous and protracted voyage) he set about plans for "instituting associations for bettering the condition of human-kind." [3] "Might I not extend [illegible] stand at the balcony of our window,[4] and watch till I see a man *who looks likely*. . . . I throw a book to him." *To this* Harriet adds in a postscript: "I'm sure you would laugh were you to see us give the pamphlets. We throw them out of window. . . . For myself, I am ready to die of laughter when it is done, and Percy looks so grave; yesterday he put one into a woman's hood of a cloak." Percy certainly was in terrible earnest, and very much distressed that his youth was such a disadvantage. "Strange," he complains, "that truth should

[1] See letter, January 29, 1812.
[2] March 8, 1812.
[3] February 14, 1812.
[4] To E. H., February 27, 1812.

not be judged by its inherent excellence independent of any reference to the author! To improve on this *advantage* the servant gave out that I was only fifteen years of age."

Even Godwin suggested that Shelley was rather young for so ambitious a scheme; that he was publishing too soon; and that by attempting to institute political associations he was acting in violent contradiction to the advice contained in *Political Justice.* Wisely and persuasively Godwin pointed out the importance of remembering that "almost every institution or form of society is good in its place, and in the period of time to which it belongs," and warned him against sudden upheavals.

Shelley replied that the letter had given him much food for thought, and bade his master guide and direct him. But as for Godwin's warning against the dangers of associations, for which he would substitute the written word and the fireside discussion, Shelley could not help pointing out that "*Political Justice* was first published in 1793; nearly twenty years have elapsed since the general diffusion of its doctrines. What has followed? Have men ceased to fight? Have vice and misery vanished from the earth? Have the fireside communications which it recommends taken place?"

Godwin had warned his pupil against being entirely guided by his own conviction that "a preponderance of good" would result from his schemes. Every man, he said, *imagines* that such will be the result of his actions. But Shelley refused to be led into any such sophistical blind-alleys. "I certainly believe," he stalwartly replied, "that the line of conduct which I am now pursuing will produce a preponderance of good; when I get rid of that conviction, my conduct shall be changed." So for a few weeks longer he continued his attack upon the hearts of Ireland.

But his hopes were already beginning to wane. Miss Hitchener, in whom he perceived "the embryon of a mighty intellect which may one day enlighten thousands," had been unable to join them in Ireland. Godwin continued to disapprove, and though he had made the acquaintance of several important public men on the Catholic side, he was discouraged by the narrowness of party spirit, and the intolerance of the Catholic aristocracy. For the first time he was being made to realize the intractability of the human material, especially when it was wretched. "The poor of Dublin," he wrote to Godwin, "are assuredly the meanest and most miserable of all . . . one mass of animated filth." He realized the impossi-

bility of addressing his crusade to them. Their leaders pleased him no better.

Fortunately for Shelley the poet, Shelley the politician had failed. He had been brought face to face with some of the worst follies and miseries of man, and had found that reasoned appeals to Tolerance and Benevolence were powerless against them. He did not as yet seek in his Imagination for subtler and sharper weapons; but he abandoned the field of political action altogether.

"You say," Godwin had written to him, "'What has been done within the last twenty years?' Oh that I could place you on the pinnacle of ages, from which these twenty years would shrink to an invisible point! It is not after this fashion that moral causes work in the eye of Him who looks profoundly through the vast and, allow me to add, venerable machine of human society."

"I submit," replied Shelley, "I shall address myself no more to the illiterate. I will look to events in which it will be impossible that I can share, and make myself the cause of an effect which will take place ages after I have mouldered in the dust. I need not observe that this resolve requires stoicism. There is not a completer abstraction than labouring for distant ages."

Already his feet seem to be treading the arduous road which will bring him, nearly ten years later, when an exile from his country, an outcast of society, a derided and slandered poet, to say in a letter to his wife: "My greatest content would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, would build a boat, and shut upon my retreat the flood gates of the world. . . . I would be *alone*, and would devote, either to oblivion or to future generations, the overflowings of a mind which, timely withdrawn from the contagion, should be kept fit for no baser object." A week before his death he was writing to a friend about the desperate condition of England and Ireland. "I once thought," he says, "to study these affairs, and write or act in them. I am glad that my good genius said, *refrain*."

In the shape of Godwin's admonition, and his own failure and lack of funds, Shelley's good genius conducted him back across the Irish Channel in the beginning of April, 1812. With his wife and her sister he spent a few weeks in Wales in the very [illegible]
He w[illegible]
for th[illegible]
"habit of analysing feelings," now that the feelings were

pleasant ones, no longer interfered with his joy in the beauty of mountains and streams.

"Oh my friend," he wrote to Miss Hitchener, "what shall I say of the scenery? But *you* will enjoy it with us, which is all that is wanting to render it a perfect Heaven. . . . I will not here reassert all my assertions of friendship, but a hint that my perceptions of your excellences are unbounded is enough between such as us."

It must be said in excuse of Miss Hitchener's foolish proceedings that a hint was not enough; that it was only after months of immoderate protestations and persuasions on Shelley's part that she finally decided to abandon her little school in Sussex and join Shelley and his family for an indefinite period. What exactly she was to do was left undefined; she was to help Shelley bring nearer the Millennium. She arrived at Lynmouth, whither they had migrated, in July. In October they had all moved to London, and by November Miss Hitchener had been dismissed. Fortunately, sheer absence of facts enables us to deal briefly with this the most unpleasant episode in Shelley's life. In the spring he was still addressing her as "Friend of my soul"; he even went so far as to call her a "thunder-riven pinnacle of rock firm amid the boiling surge." "When our ship anchors close to thee," he cries, "the crew will cover thee with flowers." Harriet had long ago joined in the chorus of praise. It is comforting to know that she frequently added postscripts to her husband's letters to his deity, and begged her beloved friend (whom she had never met) to come and live with them. "Amiable woman!" she is moved to exclaim, "if I had known thee before, it would have been delightful; but I must be content I know you now, and this blessing I should not have had if I had never been to Clapham."

The unmitigated absurdity of this correspondence might almost disarm criticism of its serious consequences. But when we find Shelley, after four months spent in her company, ready to pour every sort of abuse and mockery upon the unfortunate schoolmistress whose head he had turned, it becomes impossible to shield him against a verdict of unmanliness, almost of brutality. And that verdict remains even if we unreservedly believe Harriet's statement,[1] that Miss Hitchener tried to step between her and her husband; even if we allow that Eliza Westbrook was quite cunning enough to succeed in prejudicing Shelley against a person she wished to be rid of.

To those who believe that Shelley was by nature inhuman

[1] Letter to Mrs. Nugent, November 14, 1812.

and fickle, his treatment of Miss Hitchener will seem nothing surprising. But anyone who has troubled to study his letters will know that, though he was capable of extraordinarily childish outbursts of irritation against some friend, whom the very next hour he would welcome affectionately, and though he would convey his annoyance to paper without restraint or hesitation, he was very slow to harden his heart against anyone he had once loved, and still slower to refuse any man his help.[1] His efforts to be reconciled to his family were countless. Hogg he never abandoned. When Harriet had ceased to be in the position of a wife to him, he tried, however absurdly, to remain her friend. With Clare Clairmont,[2] capricious, selfish, moody though she was, he was consistently patient, and gentle, and though sometimes a little more captivated by her, and sometimes a good deal less, he never reacted from kindness into harshness. He served Godwin and bore with him with the patience of a saint.

His connexion with Miss Hitchener was indeed the queerest episode in this queer period of his life. His letters to her, so often a collection of mere cold-blooded sentimentalities, or imbecilities, have here and there passages of deep feeling. "When time," he had said to her, "has enrolled us in the list of the departed, surely this one friendship will survive to bear our identities to heaven." It was not out of emotional shallowness or commonplace inconstancy that he threw this friendship away. It was because it had never existed but in his dreams; he had built it out of the feverish energies of his perverted imagination; and Miss Hitchener had to pay the penalty of being—as she undoubtedly was—an illusion. She seems on the whole to have borne her fate with patience, encouraged no doubt by the fact that Shelley paid her £100 a year till she was settled again at her profession. When she was once more a respected schoolmistress and a repentant Christian she is said to have treasured his memory to the end of her life.

Shelley's imagination continued for a little while longer to

[1] There are two letters of Shelley's, *both dated* Oct. 29, 1820, one of which remarks: "The Gisbornes are the most odious and filth[illegible]
which I ever came in con[illegible]
begins: "Dear Friend,—[illegible]
mars?" And a very st[illegible]
"animals" in every pos[illegible]
sell a chest of drawers [illegible]

[2] Clare Clairmont was [illegible]
lived more or less under [illegible]
death.

practise deceit upon himself and other people. Though he had failed to make Ireland virtuous and free, he still believed his mission to be that of political propaganda. From Lynmouth he had published a *Declaration of Rights*, which he attempted to disperse over the world by sending copies up in fire-balloons, or launching them in the sea in bottles. But this did not seem enough; as Dowden puts it: "Sea and air had been invaded by Shelley's envoys, and the element of fire was his servant; it remained for him to operate somehow on this solid earth." So he had sent his Irish servant to paste up the "Declaration" on the walls of Barnstaple, and there the man was arrested and imprisoned. Shelley was too poor to bail him out, and could do nothing for him but pay fifteen shillings a week for additional comforts during the six months that he was in gaol. Having an uncomfortable feeling that the authorities had their eye upon him—and they certainly had—he decided to move back to the wild seclusion of Wales. At the end of August he and the three ladies suddenly departed. It was several weeks later that Godwin, having heard nothing of their removal, accepted the often pressed invitation to visit them in Lynmouth. He arrived, after two squally days at sea, and a long fast, and it says a good deal for his philosophy that the enthusiasm of their late landlady for the Shelleys (whom Godwin himself had never set eyes on) and the news that they were soon coming to London, comforted him in his disappointment.

Shelley settled at Tremadoc in Carnarvonshire, and set about reclaiming the earth from the sea. A Mr. Madocks of that place had recently by means of an embankment rescued some thousands of acres from the tide, and was now attempting to save a still larger tract. Mr. Madocks, as Harriet expressed it in a letter, "is building an embankment which does honour to him and is an ornament to his country." Shelley became his enthusiastic supporter and began to raise money for the cause which he vowed only to desert with his life. He went to London for some weeks to collect funds (and it was here he got rid of Miss Hitchener). All through the winter months he worked for Mr. Madocks' agent nearly all day long. But by January his enthusiasm was fast abating—either because money was clearly powerless to fill in the gap between the two ends of Mr. Madocks' sea wall, or because Mr. Madocks, or his agent, behaved like Peacock's hero the Lord High Commissioner of the embankment who "drank the profits, and left the embankment to his deputies, who left it to their assistants, who left it to itself."

Whether Harriet really meant that the embankment was an ornament to its country, or whether she meant to apply this compliment to Mr. Madocks, by January 16 she is quite of another mind—from which we judge that Shelley had changed his. "I find I have been dreadfully deceived respecting that man," she writes. "*The sea which used to dash* against the most beautiful and grand rocks . . . was, to please his stupid vanity and to celebrate his name, turned from its course, and now we have for a bold fine sea, which there used to be, nothing but a sandy marsh uncultivated and ugly to the view. . . ."

Yet for a time Shelley did not quite despair of his task, and was still interested in it, and busily engaged in alleviating the sufferings of the unfortunate in the neighbourhood—both human and animal—when a farmer, whose sheep he had been in the habit of shooting when he found them afflicted with scab, made an attack upon his house in the middle of the night and let off a pistol. Shelley thought himself pursued by an assassin, was, rather naturally, unnerved, and immediately *left the* neighbourhood for ever—as the farmer had intended [illegible]

taking the matter so seriously, sent the £20, by means of which Shelley with Eliza and Harriet escaped back again to Dublin.

It was just about twelve months since they had left; a twelve *months* into which Shelley had crowded enough failures to have embittered an ordinary lifetime. He had failed in Ireland, *and failed* at Tremadoc; the *Declaration of Rights* had merely sent one man to gaol, while the letter to Lord Ellenborough had failed to get one man out of it. He had failed in friendship, and he had failed financially, for his father still refused to give him a reasonable income and he was fast running into debt. He had spent much of his time writing *Queen Mab*, which was to be the most notorious and harmful to himself of all his failures: and adopting a system of philosophy he was soon to repudiate. He had become a vegetarian, which, according to both Harriet and Peacock, was bad for his health, and renounced the classics, which was bad for his mind and soul. In only one respect could he be said to have made any progress: his worship of Reason (perhaps through the instrumentality of Miss Hitchener) had been somewhat

[illegible]
first [illegible] was
by [illegible] azine

purged of its admixture of sentiment, and his argumentative style had consequently improved. The letter to Lord Ellenborough is a bold attack upon established religion, which is yet free from the puerile bitterness and prejudice which had appeared in Shelley's earlier attitude to Christianity and were to reappear in *Queen Mab*; it is the protest of a moralist against the subjection of virtue to doctrine: against the "supposition," obviously so dangerous, "that the will of God is the source or criterion of morality."

During the year 1812 Shelley became an ardent follower of the French Materialistic School, of whose doctrines he afterwards said:[1] "They are as false as they are pernicious; but still they are better than Christianity, inasmuch as anarchy is better than despotism." The French Philosophy was a barren soil for a born idealist like Shelley, yet: "A positive faith and a creative sentiment underlay their rage of destruction—a faith in human intellect and the sentiment of social justice."[2] It was this that attracted him above all things; for all through these years of misdirected energy his saving grace was always his "enthusiasm of humanity." "I can by no means conceive," he wrote to Godwin, "how the loftiest disinterestedness is incompatible with the strictest materialism. In fact the doctrine which affirms that there is no such thing as matter, and that which affirms that all is matter, appear to me perfectly indifferent in the question between benevolence and self-love."

This new philosophy, however, deprived him of two consolations: he began to doubt the immortality of the soul—a faith to which he had clung long and passionately; and in direct contradiction to Scott's advice, he turned his back upon the illuminating and sobering influence of the classics. "It certainly is my opinion," he wrote to Godwin,[3] "that the evils of acquiring Greek and Latin considerably overbalance the benefit. . . . Was not the government of republican Rome and most of those of Greece, as oppressive and arbitrary, as liberal of encouragement to monopoly, as that of Great Britain is at present? And what do we learn from their poets? As you have yourself acknowledged somewhere, 'they are fit for nothing but the perpetuation of the noxious race of heroes in the world.' Lucretius forms, perhaps, the single exception."

It is difficult to believe that there was ever a poet in such

[1] Letter, April 11, 1822.
[2] Dowden, vol. i, p. 333.
[3] July 29, 1812.

a plight as the Shelley of these years. He was utterly out of touch with the literary revival of his time; materialism limited his vision on earth, and atheism forbade any prospect beyond it. His energies, constrained into the one aim of political reform, were not appeased but irritated by the completeness of his failures in public life. In private life relationships built upon Reason only were likely to prove one by one houses upon the sand. "Reason," he said to Godwin, "if I may be allowed to personify it, is as much your superior as you are mine." Wisdom would have taught Shelley that this was the very thing *not* to say to a philosopher; but to think upon Reason did not bring Shelley "perfectness of understanding." [1] And when he was come into his house, to find there Reason personified was not to find gladness and joy.[2] Miss Hitchener had been Shelley's idea of Reason incarnate; and for four months she had sat in his house, as Harriet described her, "very busy writing for the good of mankind . . . talking a great deal . . . as thin as it is possible to be." [3] And when Miss Hitchener was gone there was still Eliza Westbrook, "meagre, prim and constrained," [4] and guided entirely by Reasons—of her own. And Harriet herself, once the simple docile girl wife, was becoming rather pompous and tedious with her parrot-like invocations of Justice and parade of political fervour. "What do you think of Cobbett?" and "What think you of Lord Stanhope?" and "Oh, if I were to meet Lord Castlereagh I really think I could fly at him and tear him to pieces!" and "I cannot bear Curran . . . I have no patience with Curran . . ." and "What think you of Bonaparte?" and (to her Irish friend Mrs. Nugent) "Continue, oh amiable woman, the path marked out to thee by virtue and humanity and let not the whisperings of selfishness in us take thee from so laudable an undertaking"; and (to the same) "You do not let your feelings get the better of your reason. If you do I am extremely sorry, as I shall know from that you are not as happy as you ought to be." Though it was all Shelley's own fault, it must have been very uninspiring. And it was in these surroundings, in this state of mind, that he composed *Queen Mab.* "The Past, the Present, and the Future," he told his publisher, Hookham, "are the grand and comprehensive topics of this poem. I have not yet half exhausted the second of them." This was in August, 1812. By February,

[1] *Wisdom of Solomon*, vi. 15.
[2] *Ibid.*, viii. 16.
[3] Harriet to Catherine Nugent, August 4, 1812.
[4] Hogg, p. 371.

1813, the Future also was exhausted; not so the poet; he was active, "preparing the notes which shall be long and philosophical." "I shall take that opportunity, which I judge to be a safe one, of propagating my principles which I decline to do syllogistically in a poem. . . ." "A poem very didactic is I think very stupid." "*The didactic,*" however, we find him telling Hogg, "is in blank heroic verse"—and "blank heroic verse" covers nine-tenths of the poem. As for propagating his principles in the notes, in March he tells Hookham for the third time that "the notes will be long and philosophical—and antichristian." But he adds, wondering how much Hookham will venture, "This will be unnoticed in a note." Finally, *Queen Mab*, and other poems "all breathing hatred of government and religion," are to be printed "on fine paper, and so as to catch the aristocrats."

What is it, this undidactic poem of which the didactic is in blank heroic verse, and the descriptive in blank lyrical measure? This poem whose theme is the Past, Present and Future, attended by long philosophical antichristian notes, which are to remain unnoticed?

It is just such a hotchpotch as Shelley was bound to produce for his sins. What little imagination and feeling it has[1] is stifled by proselytism and prejudice; its occasional music is set to the thumping of a tub; printed, as it often is, without the vigorous and entertaining notes, it is dull indeed.

The most remarkable thing about it is that it contains in embryo almost all the ideas of which Shelley eventually made great poetry: a sufficient proof, if one were needed, that it is not the idea that makes the poem. In this strange setting of mincing eighteenth century verse mixed with revolutionary war-cries, Shelley's feelings are as utterly obscured as his imagination. When in the eighth and ninth sections he embarks upon what was later to be his favourite theme—a vision of the Millennium, he harks back almost immediately into describing the present misery under kings and priests, because he believes this to be *better propaganda.*

Another remarkable thing is that *Queen Mab* has been without question the most popular of Shelley's longer poems. Only 250 copies were printed in 1813, but of this one at least reached Berlin and came into the hands of Kotzebue; several reached America, while a young Brazilian, a fervent admirer, set about making a version in Portuguese. While Shelley had the utmost difficulty in getting his other works recognized

[1] The metre and many descriptions in the lyrical part are closely imitative of Southey.

in any way, and always published them at his own expense, *Queen Mab* was piratically printed, to its author's harm and annoyance, in 1821. Some time after 1829 Medwin attended a gathering of "Owenites," where copies of *Queen Mab* were spread on a table for sale after the meeting. "*Queen Mab*," says Medwin, "is indeed the gospel of the Sect, and one of them told me that he had found a passage in Scripture, that undoubtedly referred to Shelley, and that the word *Shiloh* was pronounced in the Hebrew precisely in the same manner as his name." By 1887 there had been more than fifteen editions of *Queen Mab* in English, four of them American, as compared with four editions in all of *Adonais*, and three of the *Cenci*. Of modern writers, Mr. Shaw has expressed his opinion that *Queen Mab* is superior to the *Cenci*, while in Germany, according to M. Koszul, it is probably to this day the best known of Shelley's poems. Such vagaries are largely the result of a state of mind for which Shelley is himself, in a manner, partly responsible; he was only too prone to resemble a prohibitionist who should believe no song in the world equal to "Drink to me only with thine eyes."

It was during his second visit to Ireland that Shelley dispatched *Queen Mab* to his publisher. In spite of Hookham's loan of £20 he was very short of funds at Dublin. Such sudden and ill-organized flittings as his, were naturally expensive. Moreover, shortly before the attack on his house at Tremadoc he had sent £20, the whole of his ready money, to help the Hunts pay off the terrible fine of £1,000, which in addition to two years' imprisonment had been inflicted upon them for daring to criticize the character and appearance of the Prince Regent. Shelley also wrote to Hunt, making what Hunt described as "a princely offer,"[1] but one which he was in a position not to accept. In spite of poverty—and Shelley was always under the temptation to run into debt on the strength of his expectations—after a short time in Dublin he, Eliza and Harriet paid a visit to Killarney. It was at this juncture that the unfortunate Hogg arrived in Dublin, and had to return without seeing his friends at all. Shelley seemed to be genuinely distressed at having missed him, and early in April he returned to London—leaving Eliza, and a collection of books which for some mysterious reason he had taken with him, to dwell alone among the beauties of Killarney. This seems to be the first serious attempt he made to shake off Eliza—and it is a characteristically preposterous one. Of

[1] Shelley would probably have tried to raise money for Hunt on *post-obit* bonds.

course, after a very few weeks Eliza was back again, leaving the books to moulder by themselves.

When Shelley settled in London, in April, 1813, a big change was coming over his life. In the previous October he had at last met Godwin, and whether under his influence or as a result of so many failures, he seemed to have definitely abandoned the idea of being an active political reformer. Godwin advocated conversation and writing. Writing Shelley had tried—but it is obvious that he soon ceased to be satisfied with *Queen Mab*, and as for conversation, probably no one had ever engaged in so many ethical and political discussions as Shelley, and he may have been beginning to perceive their futility.

The Shelleys settled in a fashionable part of London, and Harriet and Eliza, being tired of a roving, lonely, aimless existence, began to look about for new attractions. Shelley himself, in spite of frequent visits to Godwin, and a renewal of friendship with Hogg, had come, as it were, to the end of a long lane and must take a new turn. Friendship with Godwin —actual intercourse with the members of his strange household[1]—though at first warmly appreciated had soon proved something of a disappointment. Shelley's admiration for Godwin's intellect and for the wisdom of many of his doctrines had not abated, and in face of sore trials, never did abate. But Godwin, perhaps—in this respect not unlike Miss Hitchener —had been misled by the worshipful tone of Shelley's letters into expecting a docile and accommodating admirer. He was possibly not quite prepared for a young man whose only genuine and constant admiration was for ideas, who in fact really believed that Reason was the superior of Godwin, and acted and argued accordingly. "Godwin," Harriet wrote early in 1813, "is changed,[2] and filled with prejudices, besides too, he expects such universal homage from all persons younger than himself, that it is very disagreeable to be in company with him on that account." We may be pretty sure that Harriet is expressing the views of her husband. Mrs. Godwin also is soon found to be "dreadfully disagreeable," a verdict probably not unjust.[3] The revival of his intimacy with Hogg had cost him pain, and Harriet, we gather, some natural

[1] Mary Godwin, Shelley's future wife, was absent from home during all the time of these early visits.

[2] The friends of Harriet and Percy were always changing—it was very trying.

[3] "A very disgusting woman and wears green spectacles," said Charles Lamb.

embarrassment. And at the best it was but the patching up of an old connexion, of which the glory had for ever departed. So, too, was one more, and the last, attempt to be reconciled to his father. The Duke of Norfolk was again making an effort to mend the quarrel, and as Shelley was coming of age a reconciliation was more than ever desirable. "If I could convince you," Percy wrote to Mr. Timothy, "of the change that has taken place in some of the most unfavourable traits of my character, and of my willingness to make any concessions that may be judged best for the interest of my family, I flatter myself that there would be little further need of his Grace's interference." This looks so like a submission at last of poverty to the bribe of wealth, that the reader is as much relieved as Mr. Timothy was shocked, to discover that Shelley never meant by this sentence to forswear his principles and opinions. The father would on no other condition see or communicate with his son. "I sincerely regret," wrote Shelley then to the Duke, "that any of your valuable time should have been occupied in the vain and impossible task of reconciling myself and my father. . . . I was prepared to make my father every reasonable concession, but I am not so degraded and miserable a slave as publicly to disavow an opinion which I believe to be true. Any man of common sense must plainly see that a sudden renunciation of sentiments seriously taken up is as unfortunate a test of intellectual uprightness as can possibly be devised."

Very soon after writing this letter Shelley stayed for the last time in his old home. His father, and three of the children were absent, and his mother had taken the opportunity to write to him. There is an account of the visit from a young man who was a friend of the house, and was staying there when Shelley came. "At this time," he writes, "I had not seen Shelley, but the servants, especially the old butler, Laker, had spoken of him to me. He seemed to have won the hearts of the whole household. Mrs. Shelley often spoke to me of her son; her heart yearned after him with all the fondness of a mother's love. . . . He received me with frankness and kindliness, as if he had known me from childhood; I fancy I see him now, as he sat by the window, and hear his voice, the tones of which impressed me with his sincerity and simplicity."

As Mr. Timothy's heart alone of the whole household was not to be won, his son continued as poor as ever, while his expenses daily increased. Poor Harriet had done her best; in the wilds of Keswick, Wales and Ireland, and while she was

still almost a child, she had dutifully cultivated revolutionary sentiments; she had echoed and copied out her husband's invocations to Reason and Liberty and Brotherhood. When she found herself again in London, after two years of uncomfortable philanthropy, she promptly—and inevitably—illustrated the truth of Shelley's doctrine that Belief is not voluntary, not an action but a passion of the mind. Harriet discovered her belief in fashionable lodgings, carriages and bonnets. Hogg, though not an altogether trustworthy witness, since he had a grudge against Harriet, emphasizes the fact that at this time she was changed. She had ceased to read aloud: she had lost her interest in her studies: her walks usually conducted "to some fashionable bonnet-shop." A surer witness are Harriet's own letters, and the fact that she urged Shelley to the extravagance of buying plate and a carriage, which he could not pay for, and certainly never wanted for himself.

About the middle of June of this year (1813) Harriet's first child, Ianthe, was born. Fatherhood was an event to which Shelley had looked forward almost from his boyhood if one may judge from his early schemes of education, and several references to the possibility in letters written after his marriage. But Ianthe did not bring him good luck. She had the effect of maturing Harriet into the commonplace little woman she had been meant for, and she strengthened the domination of Eliza. Under Eliza's influence Harriet refused to nurse her baby. Peacock believed that Shelley was pained and alienated by this lack of natural feeling, and from what we know of his views it seems very likely. Eliza too, who had hitherto been Banker and General Manager to the household, seems now to have become also Head Nurse.

In all three capacities Eliza was no doubt bitterly disappointed when the young heir to the Shelley estates reached and passed his twenty-first birthday, and remained, on account of the perversity of his opinions, the proud owner of but £400 a year. Reform and Scepticism were all very well as a joke, Eliza may have thought; sympathy with these whims of Shelley's had been very useful to her schemes in the past; but she had never expected that they would really obstruct her own and Harriet's path to riches. Harriet, probably influenced by her adored sister's disappointment even more than by the check to her own new-found love of finery, felt the blow keenly. Her letters to her Irish friend are full of it. Where formerly she had written long accounts of "Percy's" activities, and lamented over Liberty and Ireland, it is now the damaged prospects of "Mr. S." that she bewails. "Mr.

S. is of age, but *no* longer heir to the immense property of his sires. They are trying to take it away, and will I am afraid succeed." The habit of echoing Shelley's moral sentiments is still strong, for she goes on: "You may suppose that we will do everything to prevent this shameful abuse of property, as we are convinced that more good would be effected if we have it than if they regain it. . . . To have all our plans set aside in this manner is a miserable thing. Not that I regret the loss, but for the sake of those I intended to benefit." Somehow the echo does not ring so true; partly perhaps, because it was on account of so many weeks spent in the fashionable part of London, and on account of that fine carriage of Harriet's, that when this letter was written (August 8, 1813) Shelley was in real danger of being arrested for debt. "We are now in a house thirty miles from London, *merely for convenience*," says Harriet, and "I fear our necessities will oblige us to remove to a greater distance."

The house thirty miles from London was at Bracknell, and there Shelley resided intermittently until the following summer. His settling there was not only due to his desire of being out of reach of creditors; it was in order to be within reach of new friends.

During those two months in London, when Harriet was so often out shopping,[1] when Shelley's family was so unapproachable, when Godwin with his dignity and his disagreeable wife tended to be so uninspiring, Shelley had taken his new turn; he had learned Italian and become intimate with the household of Madame de Boinville, daughter of a West Indian planter, widow of a French emigré who had perished in the retreat from Moscow, mother of a brilliant and charming family. Mrs. Boinville's sister had married a Mr. Newton, and with his family Shelley had become acquainted on his short visit to London from Wales the preceding year. From Mr. Newton he had acquired that philosophy of vegetarianism which fills such a large portion of the notes to *Queen Mab.* [illegible]

clothed. It was at their house, and during the autumn of 1813, that Hogg, calling with Shelley, had the vision of that Jacob's ladder he describes so delightfully, when the five naked children ran down the stairs to welcome "the beloved Shelley," discovered a stranger with him, and scampered screaming up again.

[1] See Hogg's account.

Much has been said against these fascinating faddists, the Newtons, the Boinvilles, the Turners, and much has been hinted against Shelley's intimacy with them. The simple fact is that these people obviously began the salvation of the poet. Even Hogg, who always seeks high and low for objects of derision, and describes the greater part of the Boinville circle as "odious," admits that they were themselves "amiable and elegant friends," and describes the delight that he and Shelley took in their Italian lessons from Mrs. Boinville and her married daughter Cornelia Turner.

Through them Tasso, Ariosto, and Petrarch dawned upon Shelley's vision where had reigned before the leaden skies of *Political Justice* and *Le Système de la Nature*, while the fact that this new circle of friends were also reformers, Godwinites, and democrats seemed to reconcile his indulgence of the imagination with those purposes of practical philanthropy to which he still clung.

Because of the Boinvilles, Shelley chose to settle at Bracknell in August, 1813, and here he made friends with Peacock; and Peacock it was who led him back to the classics. Peacock was no admirer of the Boinvilles; theirs was a society of that mixed effusiveness and culture, generosity and gush, which has its place in the world and its charm; but to Peacock it was merely a subject for satire. To *them*, the budding humorist seemed a "cold scholar" unworthy of the friendship of Shelley's "warm nature." Shelley thought otherwise, and when in a mad attempt to escape from debt and get a change of air, he, Harriet, Eliza and the baby drove off in their carriage to Edinburgh, Peacock accompanied them. In Edinburgh we find him reading *Tacitus*, *Cicero* and the *Odyssey*. The Boinvilles had opened the gates of romance; Peacock's ardent and generous scholarship reared before Shelley a brighter Hellas, and far serener, than any he had seen before.

From November, 1813, to March, 1814, there is a gap in his correspondence,[1] and Hogg gives us no clear account of what was going on. The many delightful anecdotes he tells seem to belong mostly to the period between Shelley's first arrival in London, from Killarney, in April, and his settling at Bracknell. Hogg describes his friend as the idol of all his acquaintances, but an idol by no means easily approached. In congenial society he would talk into the early hours of the morning; but from the tedium of parties he would escape silently, mysteriously and irresistibly.

[1] At least in his published correspondence.

Shelley returned from Edinburgh in December. He had wished to leave Eliza, at any rate, behind; but both ladies insisted on accompanying him. His time during the next few months was spent partly in London, partly with the Boinvilles, partly in a house near Bracknell. Harriet was sometimes with him, and often not. Shelley was unhappy: whether or no Harriet was unhappy we have no means of judging. We only know that she chose to leave her husband, and accompany her sister to the fashionable resort of Bath.

The attempt is sometimes made to trace the history of the relationship between Shelley and his first wife from the verses that he wrote about it. But mere verse is not good evidence: poetry is another matter. Shelley's "occasional pieces" written before March, 1813, may mean much or little. Imagination has not been at work upon them, rejecting the false, testing the true; the feelings they describe, but do not convey, may have, as in the case of the letters to Miss Hitchener, only the shadowiest relation to any real passion, or any real person. The affectionate sonnet in praise of Ianthe and her mother, written in September, 1813, would certainly seem to show that Shelley still clung to his companion of the last two years, and it is obvious enough that his unhappiness of the following winter and spring had a great deal to do with her. To formulate any definite accusation against Harriet is, however, impossible, and to attempt to do so is unjust. The fact that Shelley had undergone so great a change during the year before their final separation, and that his developing imagination must have been increasing his demands on life, would make us incline to attribute the breach to him. Yet an examination of the little and shaky evidence there is (which includes some pathetic, reproachful, and pleading verses to Harriet, in May, 1814), certainly *does* suggest that Harriet had been treating her husband with coldness. And we know that she had chosen Eliza's company in preference to his. All that justice to Shelley's memory demands is that we should clearly understand that he was unhappy, and living mostly apart from Harriet, *before* March, 1814, and that he did not become acquainted with Mary Godwin at all until May or early June; that we should realize, in fact, that he did not desert his first wife, as is even now so often stated, or insinuated, because a new and more attractive love had crossed his path.

But his unhappiness was not all due to Harriet's coldness. It was with inevitable pain that the life was returning into his caged and stifled spirit.

The Shelley of these earlier years had written that "poetical

beauty ought to be subordinate to the inculcated moral"—that metaphorical language should be "a pleasing vehicle for useful and momentous instruction." He had written, "I have in preparation a novel . . . constructed to convey metaphysical and political opinions . . . it shall receive more correction than I trouble to give to wild romance and poetry." And he was destined to write: "Nor is it for want of admirable doctrines that men hate, and despise, and censure, and deceive and subjugate one another. But poetry acts in another and diviner manner."

He had said, "I am now an undivided votary of Reason." He had spoken of Reason as that which alone could deal with the varying circumstances of life and "adapt them so as to produce the greatest overbalance of happiness."[1] And he was destined to write: "Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance."

Locke and Hume, Voltaire and Rousseau, had seemed to him almost the only bearers of the true light: "What," he had asked, "do we learn from the Greek poets?" He was to answer his own question. "The exertions of Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau, and their disciples, in favour of oppressed and deluded humanity, are entitled to the gratitude of mankind. Yet it is easy to calculate the degree of moral and intellectual improvement which the world would have exhibited, had they never lived. A little more nonsense would have been talked for a century or two, and perhaps a few more men, women and children burnt as heretics. . . . But it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if neither Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Calderon, Lord Bacon, nor Milton, had ever existed; if Raphael and Michael Angelo had never been born; if the Hebrew poetry had never been translated; if a revival of the study of Greek literature had never taken place; if no monuments of ancient sculpture had been handed down to us, and if the poetry of the religion of the ancient world had been extinguished together with its belief."[2]

He had said "There is no God": "utility is morality." He had held that Necessity ruled all things, so that a man's actions were irresistibly decided by a chain of causes stretching out of the eternity before his birth: that all things could be calculated. But he was destined to write: "What were

[1] June 2, 1811.
[2] Defence of Poetry.

virtue, love, patriotism, friendship; what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave; and what were our aspirations beyond it, if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar?"

"Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in Man."

So great a change working within and without, in himself, and in his relations with Harriet, made Shelley miserably restless, and for a time made him mute. No letters or poems have survived to fill the gap between November and March. In March, 1814, he is staying alone with his kind friends the Boinvilles at Bracknell—and from there he writes a letter to Hogg, which contains in brief so full a history that it must be quoted in full.

BRACKNELL,
March 16, 1814.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

I promised to write to you, when I was in the humour. Our intercourse has been too much interrupted for my consolation. My spirits have not sufficed to induce the exertion of determining me to write to you. My value, my affection for you, have sustained no diminution; but I am a feeble, wavering, feverish being, who requires support and consolation, which his energies are too exhausted to return.

I have been staying with Mrs. B[oinville] for the last month; I have escaped, in the society of all that philosophy and friendship combine, from the dismaying solitude of myself. They have revived in my heart the expiring flame of life. I have felt myself translated to a paradise, which has nothing of mortality, but its transitoriness; my heart sickens at the view of that necessity, which will quickly divide me from the delightful tranquillity of this happy home—for it has become my home. The trees, the bridge, the minutest objects, have already a place in my affections.

My friend, you are happier than I. You have the pleasures as well as the pains of sensibility. I have sunk into a premature old age of exhaustion, which renders me dead to everything, but the unenviable capacity of indulging the vanity of hope and a terrible susceptibility to objects of disgust and hatred.

My temporal concerns are slowly rectifying themselves; I am astonished at my own indifference to their event. I live

here like the insect that sports in a transient sunbeam, which the next cloud shall obscure for ever. I am much changed from what I was. I look with regret to our happy evenings at Oxford, and with wonder at the hopes which in the excess of my madness I there encouraged. Burns says, you know:

> "Pleasures are like poppies spread,
> You seize the flower—the bloom is fled;
> Or like the snow-falls in the river,
> A moment white—then lost for ever."

Eliza is still with us—not here!—but will be with me when the infinite malice of destiny forces me to depart. I am now but little inclined to contest this point. I certainly hate her with all my heart and soul. It is a sight which awakens an inexpressible sensation of disgust and horror, to see her caress my poor little Ianthe, in whom I may hereafter find the consolation of sympathy. I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflowings of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable wretch. But she is no more than a blind and loathsome worm, that cannot see to sting.

I have begun to learn Italian again. Cornelia assists me in this language. Did I not once tell you that I thought her cold and reserved? She is the reverse of this, as she is the reverse of everything bad. She inherits all the divinity of her mother.

What have you written? I have been unable even to write a common letter. I have sometimes forgotten that I am not an inmate of this delightful home—that a time will come which will cast me again into the boundless ocean of abhorred society.

I have written nothing, but one stanza, which has no meaning, and that I have only written in thought:

> Thy dewy looks sink in my breast;
> Thy gentle words stir poison there;
> Thou hast disturbed the only rest
> That was the portion of despair!
> Subdued to Duty's hard control,
> I could have borne my wayward lot;
> The chains that bind this ruined soul
> Had cankered then—but crushed it not.

This is the vision of a delirious and distempered dream, which passes away at the cold clear light of morning. Its surpassing excellence and exquisite perfections have no more reality than the colour of an autumnal sunset. Adieu!

Believe me truly and affectionately yours,

P. B. SHELLEY.

I hear that you often see the N[ewton]s. Present my kindest regards to Mrs. N[ewton]; remember me also to her husband, who, you know, has quarrelled with me, although I have not consented to quarrel with him.

In April we need no stronger testimony to the misery and fever of his spirit—and to something else—than the lines written at Bracknell:

"Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon,
  Rapid clouds have drank the last pale beam of even:
Away! the gathering winds will call the darkness soon,
  And profoundest midnight shroud the serene lights of heaven.
Pause not! The time is past! Every voice cries, 'Away!'
  Tempt not with one last tear thy friend's ungentle mood:
Thy lover's eye, so glazed and cold, dares not entreat thy stay:
  Duty and dereliction guide thee back to solitude.

"Away, away! to thy sad and silent home;
  Pour bitter tears on its desolated hearth;
Watch the dim shades as like ghosts they go and come,
  And complicate strange webs of melancholy mirth
The leaves of wasted autumn woods shall float around thine head;
  The blooms of dewy spring shall gleam beneath thy feet:
But thy soul or this world must fade in the frost that binds the dead,
  Ere midnight's frown and morning's smile, ere thou and peace may meet.

"The cloud shadows of midnight possess their own repose,
  For the weary winds are silent, or the moon is in the deep:
Some respite to its turbulence unresting ocean knows;
  Whatever moves, or toils, or grieves, hath its appointed sleep.
Thou in the grave shall rest:—yet, till the phantoms flee,
  Which that house and heath and garden made dear to thee erewhile,
Thy remembrance and repentance and deep musings are not free
  From the music of two voices, and the light of one sweet smile."

Suddenly and wonderfully out of the very grave of poetry, the poet has arisen.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST EIGHT YEARS: 1814-1822

"I find I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry."
[*Keats to Reynolds*, April 18, 1817.]

"We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
  How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver,
Streaking the darkness radiantly!—yet soon
  Night closes round, and they are lost for ever:

"Or like forgotten lyres, whose dissonant strings
  Give various response to each varying blast;
To whose frail frame no second motion brings
  One mood or modulation like the last.

"We rest: a dream has power to poison sleep;
  We rise: one wandering thought pollutes the day;
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep;
  Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away:

"It is the same! For, be it joy or sorrow,
  The path of its departure still is free:
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
  Nought may endure but Mutability."[1]

NOT only was the poet in Shelley born with a suddenness probably unparalleled in the annals of literature, but he sprang forth fully armed. From this time, with very little hesitation, very few lapses, he was a master, and continued to write with ever deepening music and broadening vision till, by one of the bitterest and blindest strokes of Fate, the night closed round and he was lost for ever.

In April, 1814, he wrote the *Lines* at Bracknell; in 1815 *Alastor*; in 1816 the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*; in 1817 *The Revolt of Islam* and the sonnet *Ozymandias*; in 1818, the *Lines among the Euganean Hills, Julian and Maddalo* and many beautiful short lyrics; in 1819 the *Ode to Heaven*, the *Ode to the West Wind*, the *Indian Serenade, Prömetheus, The Cenci*; in 1820 *The Cloud, The Skylark, The Witch of Atlas*; in 1821 *Epipsychidion, Adonais, Hellas*, and many of the most famous

[1] Published 1816.

lyrics; and in what was granted him of 1822 the fragmentary *Triumph of Life*, *The Recollection*, *Ariel to Miranda*, *The Pine Forest*. It was indeed a radiant streak across the darkness—radiant and rapid.

Though his career as a poet lasted but seven years, his period of maturity as a man was even shorter. The years 1814 to 1817 passed over him like tempests—love and hope, the menace of death, the dawn of poetic ambition, the sting of injustice, the bitterness of remorse, the sweetness of true friendship—these were the experiences that made him for those last few years a man who was the amazement, inspiration and delight of all who came across him; for whom after his death his friends hungered and thirsted; crowding after the light of his memory, clamouring for relics, treasuring their recollections, and passing down to generations who have never known him the tradition of this hero-worship.

"When Shelley was alive," says Trelawny, "fanatics have asked me if he was not the worst of men; now he is dead, another set of fanatics ask me if he was not perfect." Trelawny does not tell what he answered to these questions, but proceeds in the pages that follow to describe a Shelley who was, in the best sense, perfect. But then Trelawny knew him only during the last six months of those last five years, and felt fanatically about him, as all must who are familiar with Shelley in Italy, and able to commiserate Shelley in England.

In the spring of 1814 Shelley was, as we have seen, in a mood of deep melancholy. He had awakened to a sense of his own solitariness, both in the world and at his own fireside; his youth had been crowned with failure; the future was blank. A week after writing that mournful letter to Hogg, he had left Madame de Boinville's home, the kindness and culture of which had affected him so deeply, in order to be re-married to Harriet in London. The [illegible] and contracted when he [illegible] ceremony was considered [illegible] simple act of justice to Harriet would not seem to call for explanation, but Dowden has devised the reason that Shelley wished for purposes of raising money—to establish "the legitimacy of any son who might be born to him," while Peacock has deduced from the second marriage conclusive "proof that there was no shadow of estrangement" between Shelley and Harriet at this time—nor indeed till he had met Mary. Why the cold critic and the fond worshipper should both deem Shelley capable of tricking Harriet out of her position as lawful wife, it seems difficult to explain. She would have

been free, had he done so, to marry again if the opportunity offered; but bereft of any claim to support, and with a child technically illegitimate, her position would hardly have been favourable.

After this ceremony, Harriet and her husband seem to have tried to live happily together once more, but by the middle of April Harriet had gone away with the sister she had allowed to oust Shelley from his own home, and he was again at Bracknell, where he composed the *Lines*.

His stay was brief, for Godwin was in distress, and money must be raised to help him. So he went up to London and became a frequent visitor at Godwin's house. Mary Godwin was at home again, in her seventeenth year, beautiful, clever, and spirited; in character, and in the traditions of her parentage and upbringing quite unlike any woman Shelley had ever met.

In the stanzas written to Mary in June, Shelley definitely suggests that she was the first to reveal her love. She had much less to struggle with than he had. He had to desert a wife and child; Mary had only to run away from a father—and a father who had opposed himself in his earlier writings to every marriage bond. "Love is not a whirlwind," Shelley had written to Hogg in 1811, "that it is unvanquishable." But he wrote this before he knew what love was, though after he was wedded to Harriet, and now a whirlwind was just what he found it. A few weeks were enough to convince him that whatever might be the outcome of their love, Mary Godwin alone could make his life worth having. With his astounding confidence in other people, and in his own power over them, he proceeded on July 6, to inform Godwin of his passion for Mary and ask his consent to their living together.[1] Godwin jumped to the conclusion that Shelley was yielding to a "licentious" amour, and although he continued rather unnaturally to meet Shelley in connexion with his own business affairs, he quite naturally forbade him his house. Shelley was distraught. He had expected Godwin to believe in him, and instead Godwin was making plans to remove Mary to some place of concealment. Only seventeen years before, when Godwin married this very Mary's mother, he had written to a friend to *excuse* himself, and had said "an attachment in some degree permanent between two persons of opposite sexes is right, but that marriage as practised in European countries is wrong." He went on to say, however, that the marriage

[1] This fact was revealed through the publication of some letters of Godwin's in 1911.

ceremony was at present desirable for the sake of the woman. "Having done what I thought necessary for the peace and respectability of the individual, I hold myself no otherwise bound than I was before the ceremony took place." He had understood and forgiven Mary Wollstonecraft's connexion with Imlay and adopted their illegitimate child. And now Shelley's own most true and passionate attachment to his daughter, Godwin affected to consider as mere licentiousness.[1]

Hoping to convince Godwin that his first marriage had been a mistake for both parties, Shelley next summoned Harriet to town, told her his position, and begged her to consent to a separation; Harriet would hear nothing of it. "You may suppose how I felt at the disclosure," she wrote to her friend, Mrs. Nugent. "I was laid up for a fortnight after. I could do nothing for myself. He begged me to live. The doctors gave me over. . . . They said 'twas impossible. I saw his despair, the agony of my beloved sister, and owing to the great strength of my constitution I lived; and here I am, my dear friend, waiting to bring another infant into this woeful world. . . . He will not be near me. . . . In short, the man I once loved is dead. This is a vampire. His character is blasted for ever. . . . Will you inquire for a family of the name of Colthurst in Dublin," *and so on, and so on.* We almost begin to wonder, on the basis of such letters, and Harriet's general behaviour, what *was* her motive for refusing a separation.

The discovery that Harriet was expecting another child must have increased the misery of the whole position. It is often said that as all love was dead between himself and her, Shelley "felt free" to give his hand to Mary; free to abandon his wife and children, estrange his friend and teacher, and come into still more bitter conflict with the traditions of his country! Why, then, was he in such distress that he is reported to have more than once attempted suicide? "Nothing that I ever read," says Peacock, "in tale or history could present a more striking image of a sudden, violent, irresistible, uncontrollable passion, than that under which I found him labouring . . . he showed in his looks, in his gestures, in his speech, the state of a mind suffering like a little kingdom the nature of an insurrection."

His theories were certainly opposed to the continuance of marriage relations between two persons whose love for one another had perished;[2] but it is evident from the [illegible]

[1] He uses this word to describe Shelley's feelings [illegible]

[2] See notes to *Queen Mab* for a discussion of this point.

nature of the man that he could never put such theories into practice when it plainly meant causing misery to others, without great suffering and conflict within himself. But Mary's love, and all that she could offer him of intellectual companionship, encouragement and consolation, proved "irresistible."

By the evening of Friday, July 27, while Godwin was apparently deluding himself with the belief that reasoning and prudence had cured his valuable young friend's infatuation, all was arranged for the flight.

"July 28th, Five o'clock in the morning," writes Godwin in his diary, "Macmillan calls. M.J. for Dover."[1] This is the usual laconic style of Godwin's journal, and it means that Macmillan had called at five o'clock to inform him that Shelley and Mary had started for Dover a bare hour before, and Mrs. Godwin had gone in pursuit.

And it meant that Shelley's new life had begun. Mary was not all that he first thought her, though he loved her well and truly. But she did make his life worth having—indeed it is hard to imagine what would have become of him without her. His three years with Harriet had brought a series of failures and disappointments in every sphere. Mary brought about the resurrection of his noblest hopes and feelings, and from this summer of 1814 his life grew rapidly and in every way, richer and happier. In the spring of 1814 he was homeless, without occupation, without money, loveless, very friendless, without a guide or comforter but Godwin—who was rather cold comfort—enfeebled in health, and in purpose, without reputation, disillusioned, disinherited. Three years later he is writing *The Revolt of Islam* in a mood of "unbounded enthusiasm"; he has a pleasant home at Marlow; he is the intimate friend of Leigh Hunt, Byron and Horace Smith, and is one of Hunt's circle of literary men, and by them at least acknowledged as a poet. He has found in poetry his true vocation, and an outlet for his restless idealism. In 1814 for Shelley, as for *Prince Athanase*:

> ". . . There was drawn an adamantine veil
> Between his heart and mind,—both unrelieved
> Wrought in his brain and bosom separate strife."

By 1817 the veil was gone. Henceforward he could live and work with the whole united energy of his being. Though not the only cause, Mary was a prime cause of these changes.

[1] M. J. = Mary Jane, the second Mrs. Godwin.

"You alone," he had written to her in March, 1814, "reconcile me to myself and to my beloved hopes." In a letter to Hunt of December, 1816, he says: "Perhaps I should have shrunk from persisting in the task which I had undertaken in early life of opposing myself in these evil times and among these evil tongues, to what I esteem misery and vice, if I must have lived in the solitude of the heart; fortunately my domestic circle encloses that within it which compensates for the loss."[1] And when a few days later he has been summoned to town by the news of Harriet's death, and writes to Mary giving her some account of the sad story, he says: "At least it is consoling to know that its termination *in* [? is] your nominal union with me—that after having blessed me with a life, a world of real happiness—mere Form appertaining to you will not be barren of good . . ." [the sentence seems to break off here], and continues: "Do you, dearest and best, seek happiness—where it ought to reside—in your own pure and perfect bosom; in the thoughts of how dear and how good you are to me; how wise and how extensively beneficial you are perhaps destined to become."

But Shelley, like most men, could not learn from happiness alone, and he had to face a world of sorrows and misfortunes before he could get the better of all his past errors and justify his ways and his ambitions.

When Shelley and Mary stepped into their post-chaise in the early morning of July 28, 1814, and set off for France, *he was still liable to conduct his affairs not wisely but too well.* This was his second elopement. As in 1811 he had admitted Hogg to the circle that should have contained but two, he now added Clare Clairmont, ostensibly because she knew French—but probably in reality because he did so hate her mother, and could not bear to start off upon his happy journey leaving Clare in such unfortunate circumstances.[2] The consequences were serious and long-lived.

The elopement was accompanied by far more sensation and adventure than the first had been, but, like the first, it was completely without financial backing. When they arrived in Paris they were penniless, and had to wait for nearly a week till they could raise funds on the strength of acquaint-

[1] The loss, that is, of friends and reputation [due to the evil tongues—see the earlier part of the letter]. The punctuation usually given would make Shelley guilty of a weakness, not only of grammar but of resolution, which cannot be accepted.

[2] See letter of Mrs. Godwin to Lady Mountcashell, printed by Dowden in his *Life*.

ances of old acquaintances, and Shelley's watch: funds so inadequate that as soon as they reached, after a laborious journey, their destination on the Lake of Lucerne, and had engaged very uncomfortable rooms for six months, they decided to return, by the "least costly mode of travel." "Get up at five," writes Clare in her diary on that occasion, "bustle, toil and trouble; most laughable to think of our going to England the second day after we entered a new house for six months, all because the stove don't suit. As we left Dover, and England's white cliffs were retiring, I said to myself: 'I shall never see these more'—and now I am going to England again—dear England." Shelley seems to have infected Clare with his own peculiarity of making eternal farewells and long last departures and following them up almost immediately with speedy returns and rapturous meetings.

It was all very well for Clare, of course, to sprinkle a little laughter among the sentimentalities of her diary: for her it was all just a rare adventure. Mary and Shelley conducted their melodramatic flight in deadly earnest. Shelley's *Journal* is in the style of his early letters—a strange mixture of stilted and impassioned utterances. On July 28, the day of the elopement, he writes: "The night preceding this morning, all being decided, I ordered a chaise to be ready by four o'clock. I watched until the lightning and the stars became pale. At length it was four. I believed it not possible [? but] that we should succeed; still there appeared to lurk some danger even in certainty. I went; I saw her; she came to me. Yet one-quarter of an hour remained. Still some arrangement must be made, and she left me for a short time. How dreadful did this appear; it seemed we trifled with life and hope; a few minutes passed; she was in my arms—we were safe; we were on our road to Dover."

Their desperate drive, their embarkation in a fishing-boat by moonlight upon a sea so calm that "the sails flapped in the flagging breeze," the gradual approach of storm during the night, until "a thunder-squall struck the sail and the waves rushed in," all this reads like some romantic fiction. "Mary did not know our danger," Shelley writes in his Journal; "she was resting between my knees, that were unable to support her; she did not speak or look, but I felt that she was there. I had time in that moment to reflect and even to reason upon death; it was rather a thing of discomfort and disappointment than horror to me. We should never be separated, but in death we might not know and feel our union as now. I hope, but my hopes are not unmixed with fear for

what will befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die.

"The morning broke, the lightning died away, the violence of the wind abated. We arrived at Calais whilst Mary still slept; we drove upon the sands. Suddenly the broad sun rose over France."

So far all was in the grand style. But at Calais they spent a day waiting for luggage, and with the luggage came—not the furious father of romance, but news of the arrival of "a fat lady who had said that I had run away with her daughter; it was Mrs. Godwin," or, as Godwin called her in his diary, M.J. The daughter Mrs. Godwin was pursuing was her own daughter Clare; Godwin seems to have abandoned Mary to her fate. But Clare was not going to forgo her first adventure and visit abroad, and M.J. alone re-embarked the next day for Dover. The three travellers drove on to Paris. There they spent six days searching for funds, reading poetry and old letters, and seeing the sights.[1]

They left Paris for Lucerne in truly melodramatic fashion; on foot, the ladies in black silk dresses, a donkey following with the luggage, a basket of bread and fruit for provender, and prognostications of brigands and kidnappers to speed them with a true sense of adventure. But instead of brigands they found bugs, and rats which, Clare maintained, put their cold paws upon her face at night. After a while they entered a district devastated by war, and Shelley was intensely horrified by the masses of ruins, though the sparse artillery of those days had left "beautiful trees" to screen the desolation. The last part of their journey they drove in a carriage, as Shelley had strained his leg, and after enduring many discomforts, and enjoying much fine scenery, they arrived on August 23 at the Lake of Lucerne: it was on the 27th that they started home again. During the few days that they passed there in rain and wind Shelley commenced a novel; while in the course of their journey home by the Rhine, Mary and Clare also were inspired with stories. The titles of these offsprings

[1] Shelley's taste at this period is curiously illustrated by his entry in the Journal that at the Louvre "the only remarkable picture which we had time to observe" was one of "the Deluge which was terribly impressive." This picture, which the present writer at the age of nine found the only thing that could dispel, with irresistible shudders, the tedium of a morning with picture-gazing grown-ups, represents, I believe, a mighty welter of the elements, coming to cast up into the foreground a sodden human corpse. The fact that Shelley on his honeymoon should have dwelt upon this morbid masterpiece suggests how strong a hold the *macabre* had still upon his mind. It may provoke other reflections, strange and tragic.

of romantic travel were *The Assassins* (Shelley's), *Hate*, and *The Idiot*.

The little party arrived back in London early in September, and the fogs of reality closed in upon them.

Shelley's idol Godwin—already rather chipped in the rough-and-tumble of familiar usage—fell to pieces before him. Even so ingenuous a youth as Shelley was no doubt prepared to find Godwin annoyed (though he firmly hoped to reconcile him). But who could have expected that the author of *Political Justice* would continue to beg from one he deemed—or pretended to deem—a common seducer—and of his own daughter? But month after month Shelley had to wring out his empty purse before the man who refused to meet or forgive either himself or Mary. Shelley was "shocked and staggered by Godwin's cold injustice. The places where I have seen that man's fine countenance bring bitterness home to my heart to think of his cutting cruelty. I have at moments almost felt despair to think how cold and worldly Godwin has become."[1] Shelley wrote in a letter, many years later, that what he found so difficult to bear was that "people who have seen and known you should believe you guilty of crimes." It was a trial that dogged his steps from the day when Harriet Grove accepted the world's view of his atheism, till that when he discovered, almost at the end of his life, that Byron slandered him behind his back. But he had loved—and still loved—Godwin; and when Godwin had destroyed his love, he had still admiration and help to tender him as long as he lived.

The winter of 1814-15 was full of hardships. There were Godwin's debts and Shelley's own; Clare to support, since she refused to return home, and Mary homeless. It is plain that on going abroad Shelley had given Harriet free access to all his funds[2] and it seems that she had availed herself of the whole of them. For some time he was pursued by bailiffs, and had to lie more or less in hiding, destitute of friends and means alike. Later, when they were settled in some dreary lodgings, two old friends began to visit them. Peacock came, and Shelley writes in his diary: "I take some interest in this man, but no possible conduct of his could disturb my tranquillity." The chilliness of this entry is perhaps explained by Clare's diary for the same day, a day of quarrels and reconciliations: "Peacock calls; laughs at us." And Hogg, perhaps finding the attitude of shocked virtue really too gross an

[1] To Mary, October, 1814.
[2] See Mrs. Godwin to Lady Mountcashell.

imposture, began to visit also. Shelley's diary records: "In the evening Hogg calls; perhaps he still may be my friend, in spite of the radical differences of sympathy between us; he was pleased with Mary; this was the test by which I had previously determined to judge his character"—the entry is wonderfully typical, in its forgivingness, its forgetfulness, and its total lack of humour! Having thus made a little society for themselves, they began to enliven their loneliness and poverty with the accustomed readings and discussions. But the studies of this winter were not of a cheerful character. Shelley's morbid tastes were revived by adversity. Clare's excitable credulity infected him with his old terrors of the supernatural; most of his reading was Radcliffian or gloomily political, while of Classics he chose out Suetonius and Seneca. Poetry was once more under a cloud. He wrote nothing for many months; *The Assassins* remained a fragment; while a

could have written such poetry if he ever had dealings with money-lenders?"

But gloom and money-troubles could not destroy his happiness. When these were at their worst, he wrote to Mary that what he felt was bliss compared to the happiest moments of former times.

In February, 1815, Mary's first child was born; it was not quite a seven months' child, and lived only a few days. This was the culminating trial of their unhappy winter. In January Shelley's grandfather had ended his long, disreputable, and eccentric career, and there was hope at length of relief from debt. Shelley made a final visit to Field Place—to the outside of it only, for he was not admitted, and sat reading *Comus* on the doorstep while the eagerly awaited will was being read within. This will made him heir, subsequent to his father's death, to nearly a quarter of a million pounds, on condition that he would entail the whole estate upon his own eldest son. This he refused once more to do, and thus forfeited a large portion of his eventual inheritance and a considerable immediate income. He became possessed instead, after some months of negotiations, of an income of £1,000 a year. Two hundred of this he allotted to Harriet (who already received £200 from her own father); with the remainder he and Mary could at last set up a home of their own. Clare was despatched to friends at Lynmouth—to the great relief of Mary, with whom she was always falling out—and by August they were

settled in a house at Bishopsgate, on the borders of Windsor Park.

The hardships of the previous winter had seriously affected Shelley's health, and he seems to have brooded upon the chances of an early death. Hence the melancholy theme of *Alastor*, which was yet the first-fruit of his recovered peace of mind, and, as he told Southey, "the product of a few serene hours of the last beautiful autumn."

That the hours of serenity were few was due to Godwin, who, with the one fist doubled and the other palm extended, considerably embittered Shelley's studious winter at his own fireside, spent in reading, again under Peacock's influence, so widely in the Classics, that Hogg said the season "was a mere Atticism." During 1816 Shelley paid more than £1,000 in relief of Godwin's debts; but it was not enough—it never was enough. "I acknowledge the receipt of the sum mentioned in your letter. I acknowledge with equal explicitness my complete disappointment." This without preamble is how Godwin could begin a letter to Shelley in 1818, when he was Mary's legal husband, and a general reconciliation had been effected. How, then, did he write in the winter of 1815?

Shelley suffered deeply, and learnt much. Godwin taught him, most effectually, to recognize and venerate all that is good in a man's character in the very face of his worst defects, and he conducted the quarrels which were forced upon him with an extraordinary dignity and forbearance. Godwin never had anything good to say of his son-in-law; but in 1820, after enduring much at his hands, Shelley could write of Godwin in a letter: "Years only add to my admiration of his intellectual powers, and even the moral resources of his character."

Most of his letters to Godwin written early in 1816 are patient explanations of money affairs, and proposals for raising funds. But occasionally he breaks forth into passionate expostulation, or bitter grief—followed often enough in the next letter by words of gentle conciliation. But Godwin would have no relations with his young patron, except financial ones.. "Perhaps you do well," Shelley bitterly exclaims in reply to some icy epistle, "to consider every word irrelevant which does not regard your personal advantage." Nevertheless, he is soon again explaining and propitiating. The state of his health, and the unhappiness of their friendless position in a disapproving world, decided Mary and Shelley to go again abroad—and they probably would have gone early in the winter of 1815, if Godwin, afraid of any interruption in the schemes for his relief, had not objected. Shelley proposed

instead to travel to the North of England. "You are perhaps aware," he writes, "that one of the chief motives which strongly urges me either to desert my native country, dear to me from many considerations, or resort to its most distant and solitary regions, is the perpetual experience of neglect or enmity from almost every one but those who are supported by my resources." "You will observe," he concludes after some further account of his outcast condition, "that the mere circumstance of our departing to the North of England and not putting into effect our Italian scheme, it is strictly within the limit of the most formal intercourse that you should know. I might have misunderstood Turner, for I did not urge him to explain or literally repeat expressions, but it appeared to me from his conversation that you had communicated with him on the subject of our ancient intimacy, and of the occasion of its close, in a manner that expressed [to] a certain degree of interest in my future prospects. I determined on that account to present to you a real picture of my feelings inasmuch as they would influence my plan of residence. . . ." But Godwin at once, apparently, put an end to all hope of recon-

letter alludes to a subject in which my feelings are most deeply interested, and on which I could wish to receive an entire explanation. I confess that I do not understand how the pecuniary engagements subsisting between us in any degree impose restrictions on your conduct towards me. They did not, at least to your knowledge or with your consent, exist at the period of my return from France,[1] and yet your conduct towards me and your daughter was then precisely such as it is at present. Perhaps I ought to except the tone which you assumed in conversation with Turner respecting me, which, for anything that I learn from you, I know not how favourably he may not have perverted. In my judgment, neither I, nor your daughter, nor her offspring,[2] ought to receive the treatment which we encounter on every side. It has perpetually

My astonishment, and I will confess, when I have been treated with most harshness and cruelty by you, my indignation, has

[1] This must mean that *then* Shelley had been helping Godwin in secret.
[2] William Shelley, born January, 1816.

been extreme, that, knowing as you do my nature, any considerations should have prevailed on you to have been thus harsh and cruel. I lamented also over my ruined hopes—hopes of all that your genius once taught me to expect from your virtue, when I found that for yourself, your family, and your creditors, you would submit to that communication with me which you once rejected and abhorred, and which no pity for my poverty or sufferings, assumed willingly for you, could extort. Do not talk of *forgiveness* again to me, for my blood boils in my veins, and my gall rises against all that bears the human form, when I think of what I, their benefactor and ardent lover, have endured of enmity and contempt from you and from all mankind.

"I cannot mix the feelings to which you have given birth with details in answer to your views of my affairs. I can only say that I think you are too sanguine, but that I will do all I can not to disappoint you."

Godwin said in his reply that, "as long as understanding and sentiment shall exist in this frame, I shall never cease from my disapprobation of that act of yours which I regard as the great calamity of my life.[1] But the deed being past and incapable of being recalled, it may become a reasonable man to consider how far he can mitigate that anguish which he has felt towards the actor in the affair under which he suffers." Shelley forbore to make the obvious taunt on the subject of Godwin's "mitigations," and wrote instead: "The hopes which I had conceived of receiving from you the treatment and the consideration which I esteem to be justly due to me, were destroyed by your letter of the 5th. The feelings occasioned by this discovery were so bitter and so excruciating that I am resolved for the future to stifle all those expectations which my sanguine temper too readily erects on the slightest relaxation of the contempt and neglect in the midst of which I live. I must appear the reverse of what I am, haughty and hard, if I am not to see myself and all that I love trampled upon and outraged. Pardon me, I do entreat you, if pursued by the conviction that, where my true character is most entirely known, I have met with the most systematic injustice, I have expressed myself with violence. Overlook a fault caused by your own equivocal politeness, and I will offend no more.

"We will confine our communications to business."

A few days later he writes: "I had a long and most painful

[1] Less than a year later, when Shelley and Mary were wedded, Godwin wrote with great pride to his brother to announce his daughter's marriage to the "son of a baronet."

conversation with Turner last night on the subject of your pecuniary distress. I am not, as he, I fear, leaves you to infer, unwilling to do my utmost, nor does my disposition in the least depend on the question of your demonstrating personal kindness to myself or Mary."

All Shelley's plans for raising a considerable sum of money on part of his future property, both for

... No doubt you are anxious to hear the state of my concerns. I wish that it was in my power to give you a more favourable view of them than such as I am compelled to present. The limited condition of my fortune is regretted by me, as I imagine you well know, because among other designs of a similar nature I cannot at once put you in possession of all that would be sufficient for the comfort and independence which it is so unjust that you should not have already received from society." And he concludes, after various details and schemes for Godwin's benefit, including the promise of £300, by saying that if he returns at all, it will be in order to further these business affairs. "I leave England, I know not, perhaps for ever. I

... circumstances, every one feels who quits his native land. I respect you, I think well of you, better perhaps than of any other person whom England contains; you were the philosopher who first awakened, and who still as a philosopher to a very great degree regulates my understanding. It is unfortunate for me that the part of your character which is least excellent should have been met by my convictions of what was right to do. But I have been too indignant, I have been unjust to you—forgive me; burn those letters which contain the records of my violence, and believe that, however what you erroneously call fame and honour separate us, I shall always feel towards you as the most affectionate of friends."

From

the p

of sol

cry: The style of this letter, I fear, will appear to you unusual. The truth is that I feel the unbounded difficulty of making myself understood on the commonest topic, and I am obliged to adopt for that purpose a cold and stiff set of phrases. No person can feel deeper interest for another, or venerate their

character and talents more sincerely, or regret more incessantly his own impotent loneliness, than I for you and yours."

Godwin's heart must have been an organ exclusively useful for circulating the blood. And where was Matthew Arnold's discernment—he who professed to admire Shelley's letters so much more than his poetry—when he failed to detect in letters like these the inherent strength and tenderness of Shelley's character? Would that the recorded quarrels of great men were oftener conducted on this level. No recriminations; no petulant cries of being misunderstood—quite the contrary. "You know me so well," says Shelley in effect, "that you cannot really misjudge my relation to Mary; you are merely hardening your heart against me. But I make no claim on your affection, and my will to serve you depends upon my knowledge of your worth, and of what you are owed by mankind."

Though Shelley returned again to England and remained there for another eventful eighteen months, the feelings he describes in these letters as driving him abroad in 1816 were to a great extent responsible for his final departure in 1818. He had become reconciled with Godwin, and had made some faithful friends in the interval it is true, but his name was better known and worse detested.

The year 1816 was the most momentous in Shelley's life, and all the experiences, tragic and happy, that it heaped upon him tended to the same end—to mature him into that most strange and striking personality who during four brief years dwelt and sang "by the tideless, dolorous midland sea." Though he wrote almost nothing, his powers were immensely stimulated by travel, friendship with Byron, and later with Leigh Hunt, and by the general trend of his reading. It was during this year that he studied *Prometheus Bound*, while Spenser's *Faery Queen* and a *History of the French Revolution* prepared the way for *The Revolt of Islam.*

In January, 1816, William had been born, the only one of Shelley's children destined to live long enough in his father's society—and that but three years—to win his deepest affection. *Alastor* was published in March, and slid like a pebble to the bottom of a well. Even Hunt, who six months later praised Shelley in *The Examiner*, "unfortunately mislaid" *Alastor* as soon as it was sent him.

In May, after the collapse of the financial schemes referred to in the letters to Godwin, Shelley and Mary with the baby and Clare set out for Geneva. Soon after their arrival came Byron, as yet unknown to the Shelleys, but already

connected with Clare by a secret and shallow intrigue of which he was probably already weary. Shelley was an enthusiastic admirer of Byron's poems, while Byron himself was in great need of a little pleasant companionship. Talking of poetry, and exploring together the mountains and lakes, they became close friends. Byron was not addicted to friends, but there is ample evidence that Shelley impressed both his mind and his heart. We find from a fragment of a letter of Shelley's to Byron, written soon afterwards, that Byron had told him much about his private affairs, and from other letters that he had been entrusted with the MS. of *Childe Harold*, Canto III, and with the task of correcting the proofs. Byron's intellectual dare-devilry and vigour were something quite new to Shelley, and almost overpowered him. It is amusing to find "Mad Shelley" turning the tables to the extent of describing Byron as "an exceedingly interesting person," and yet, unfortunately, "a slave to the vilest and most vulgar prejudices, and as mad as the winds."

The two friends, often with their attendant ladies, and Byron's prophylactic puppy (kept to scare away disease, but mainly occupied in diagnosing imaginary insults and swallowing down scandal), the physician Polidori, spent most of their time in Shelley's favourite pursuit of boating. Shelley anticipated both the joys and dangers that awaited him in the Gulf of Spezzia. "He was in the habit," his boatman related, "of lying down in the bottom of the vessel, and gazing at heaven, where he would never enter."

But he was entering—and rapidly—into the kingdom of his own soul. For the first time he was delivering himself up wholly to the influence of natural beauty; for the first time—though it was upon this very holiday that he wrote himself down an atheist—he was shaping what had been for the most part mere gropings after the supernatural into a strong, though undefined, religious faith. In *Alastor* he had described, it is true, the soul's yearning after a dim ideal of beauty, but it was an ideal very remote, and altogether non-moral. In *The Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* he finds and acknowledges his God. And, as is the way with most men, in so doing he found himself. This poem has been perhaps placed too high among Shelley's works; for though on examination it proves to be in [illegible] and the last stanzas have that calm and truth

[1] See letter to Hunt, December 8, 1816: "The poem was composed under the influence of feelings which agitated me even to tears."

and grace which they invoke. Shelley, as we have seen, had brooded deeply and sadly over death, and chance and mutability; but it is here that he seems first to perceive that light which "gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream." Whatever it was that had descended upon what he here calls his "passive" youth, it was certainly not this light, or his early history would have been very different. From the first he had indeed loved all human-kind; but he had feared himself only too little. True it was that hope for the world's release from its dark slavery had never been far from his heart, but he had trusted mainly in propagandist fire-balloons, and floating bottles; in fanatical speeches and "philosophical" notes to *Queen Mab*. Now he prays for serenity such as reigns in the skies of autumn; that the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty should breathe calm and power into him. "I cannot but be conscious," he wrote to Godwin a year later, "in much of what I write, of an absence of that tranquillity which is the attribute and accompaniment of power."[1] Well might he be conscious of it, and pray—as he did to the last—for peace.

Faith and hope and joy could not at this time keep firm state in Shelley's restless heart. But their visits, however brief, brought him experiences which left him, if not omnipotent, immortal.

During this summer of 1816 the glorious Swiss scenery profoundly thrilled him, "with excess of satisfied astonishment." But here also the power and peace and grandeur of which the mountains spoke seemed infinitely remote, and almost hostile to the vacillating human heart; and he seems to have looked upon them with something of dread—a place where

> "Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,
> Remote, serene and inaccessible."

But he had realized that all these manifestations of nature's might were meaningless in themselves, for he ends his poem to Mont Blanc by asking:

> "And what were thou, and earth and stars and sea,
> If to the human mind's imaginings
> Silence and solitude were vacancy?"

One of his chief pleasures during these weeks in Switzerland was the tour which he took with Byron round the Lake of Geneva. Shelley had with him *La Nouvelle Heloïse*, by which he was completely enthralled. His references to the book and its author in his letters to Peacock are almost hysterically

[1] December, 1817.

was very different—and then pity for Clare was his strongest feeling. He was consistently fond of her, and felt some affinity with her restless, adventurous temperament. She saw life in some ways more imaginatively and romantically than Mary, and was not incapable of true and constant affections. She had a beautiful voice, which inspired the poem *To Constantia Singing*. Shelley's relation to her was in general that of a patient and devoted guardian—he reasoned with her, scolded her, consoled her, and protected her—and his money was always at her service. But he seems to have been quite aware of that vanity and shallowness in her nature which had made it possible for her to indulge her theatrical passion for Byron. By so rashly taking her away from her own home in 1814, he had made himself responsible for her subsequent behaviour. It was his duty to guide and help her, and how tactfully and tenderly he could do it his letters are witness.[1]

Clare's condition was carefully concealed from the Godwins, and either they never discovered this new misfortune, or they bore it with great equanimity.

Early in October, Mary's half-sister, Fanny Imlay, who had been living quietly at home with her stepfather and Mrs. Godwin, left London secretly, travelled to Swansea, and there committed suicide. Mrs. Godwin, who hated Shelley and liked to blame him for all the troubles that befell, declared that Fanny had killed herself out of hopeless love for him.[2] The natural explanation, which this astonishing statement may have been meant to supplant, is that Fanny, always unbalanced and low-spirited, could no longer endure the struggle of trying to be happy in the home of Mrs. Godwin.

[1] The letter written just after his marriage to Mary in December, 1816, is remarkable in this way: he shows so much consideration for Clare in her unhappy situation, and takes so great pains to avoid suggesting to her the contrast between Mary's position and her own.

[2] Clare also made the statement, years later, that Fanny had cared for Shelley. She may have been actuated by her undoubted malice against Mary. The statement seems quite incredible: a glance at Fanny's letters, as published by Professor Dowden, would seem enough to discredit it. Fanny had never seen much of Shelley, and for two years before her death had hardly set eyes on him. And again, Mary, writing to Shelley of their proposed marriage, immediately after Harriet's death, says, "Poor dear Fanny, if she had lived until this moment she would have been saved, for my house would then have been a proper asylum for her" (December 17, 1816). This surely reveals the real cause of Fanny's suicide, while proving Mrs. Godwin's statement to be quite false. Fanny's last letter shows that there had been a great deal of unpleasantness at home.

Fanny's death was a terrible blow to poor Godwin, who had been really fond of her, for her own and her mother's sake. Shelley seems to have been very deeply affected, and gave all the help and sympathy that he could; and thus the relations between the Shelleys and Godwin were somewhat improved.

The fortunate event of the early autumn for Shelley was the beginning of his friendship with Leigh Hunt. Hunt had fought and suffered in the cause that Shelley served, and, from his leading position in the literary world, was a friend that any young poet might be glad to make. But it was his sympathy and affection that Shelley in his loneliness valued inexpressibly; and Hunt had a heart almost as kind as Shelley's own. "I have not in all my intercourse with mankind experienced sympathy and kindness with which I have been so affected or which my whole being has so sprung forward to meet and to return." This Shelley wrote to Hunt quite at the beginning of their friendship, early in December, 1816. Only a week later, on December 15, came the news of Harriet's suicide, and Hunt proved himself a friend indeed. It was at Hunt's home that Shelley stayed during the wretched days he passed in London while he examined into the miserable circumstances of Harriet's death, and attempted to get possession of his children.

"Leigh Hunt has been with me all day," he wrote to Mary on the 16th, "and his delicate and tender attentions to me, his kind speeches of you, have sustained me against the weight of the horror of this event."

Did Shelley really feel the horror of Harriet's death? That question has been so often asked, and the whole story of his [illegible] tragic close so often told, that [illegible] ly would be glad to pass them [illegible] There are reasons for not doing so, and one of them is, that the human mind has so great a faculty for receiving impressions, and so small a power of digesting facts, that there are still plenty of people—people who presume to write and hold forth about Shelley—who apparently believe him to have been solely and directly responsible for Harriet's death. It is related of Shelley's son, Sir Percy,[1] that when driving one day across the Serpentine he "remarked in a casual manner to a friend, 'that is the place where my father's first wife drowned herself.'" Now if the friend in question had possessed no further information, he might quite likely have been in a state of natural apprehension lest, when they should cross London Bridge, Sir Percy should wave his hand again and summon up a similar casual recollection about the

[1] See Ingpen's *Shelley in England*.

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second wife. When a professor of great reputation, writing on Shelley in the year 1913, ends a paragraph with the statement, "when he presently abandoned her, feeling a spiritual affinity in another direction, she drowned herself in the Serpentine," and adds no further details, he is making what might be called a false relation in time, but what deserves to be called an ignorant blunder, or else a wilful travesty of the truth.[1] It is hardly surprising, when such things are written, that so many moderately well-informed people have the impression that Shelley was the sole and direct cause of Harriet's death. The facts about Harriet's life after Shelley deserted her are briefly these. When he went abroad she removed with her adored sister from Bath, where she had been living voluntarily without him, to her father's house. During the following few months she wrote some letters to a friend describing her misfortune, which no amount of determination to do her justice can find other than strange: theatrical, self-absorbed, and very cold. "How I wish these dear children had never been born. They stay my fleeting spirit when it would be in another state." "At nineteen I could descend a willing victim to the tomb. . . . Mr. Shelley has much to answer for. I shall never live with him again. 'Tis impossible." An earlier letter begins: "Your fears are verified. Mr. Shelley has become profligate and sensual, owing entirely to Godwin's *Political Justice*." Suicide had been a favourite topic of conversation with Harriet all her life, and while she could thus talk about it, there was but little fear of her committing it. Soon after Shelley's elopement, Mrs. Godwin, who, as we know, was bitterly prejudiced against Shelley, recorded: "The other day Harriet called, and said she had received an affectionate note from Shelley, saying there was money at their bankers and she might draw as much as she liked." . . . "She was in good spirits, as every one tells her that her husband will return to her." Harriet drew the money, and when Shelley arrived home there was nothing left. After a time he requested to have the care of his children, but as Harriet expressed a desire to keep them, he quite properly left them with her. Yet she

[1] Professor Santayana may perhaps be answerable only on the lighter score, for his ignorance of Shelley when he wrote *Winds of Doctrine* was so complete that he makes the statement: "Now . . . if Shelley had had time to read Spinoza—an author with whom he would have found himself largely in sympathy—he might have learned . . .," etc., etc. Now, if Professor Santayana had had time to study his subject, he might have learned that Shelley read Spinoza, mentioned Spinoza in letters, began to translate Spinoza, and planned to write a life of Spinoza.



LEIGH HUNT

FROM THE PAINTING BY MARGARET GILLIE IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

eventually sent both away to the home of a clergyman in Warwickshire. By January, 1815 (six months after Shelley's flight with Mary), she seems to have grown unhappy in her father's house, and writes, "I am so restrained here that life is scarcely worth living," and very soon she left home altogether. Shelley kept in touch with her and supported her as long as he could, but towards the end of 1816 she vanished, and he attempted to discover her address in vain. It is reported that her sister turned against her, and refused to receive her in their father's house. She certainly lived for awhile in obscure lodgings, and when she drowned herself, more than two years after Shelley had left her, she was with child by some man whose name is not known. The story that Shelley learned when he went up to London on the news of her death he described as one of "vice and folly and hard-heartedness exceeding all conception." The folly was probably Harriet's own and the hard-heartedness that of her sister,[1] whom Shelley had so hated and mistrusted. As for what he calls "the horrors of unutterable villainy that led to this dark dreadful death," these have remained unknown.[2]

This miserable story would certainly be held by any normal mind to relieve Shelley from some of his burden of responsibility, and wherever this tragedy of his first marriage is known, these facts should be known also. If he had never left Harriet, the story would perhaps have been different; but it is by no means certain that it would have been any less unhappy. Harriet's character and conduct—the style of her letters, her attitude to suicide, her relations with her children—all present an extraordinary problem. From one aspect she seems merely a commonplace but good-natured woman, fond of frivolous pleasures, and placed in an utterly unnatural position by her marriage with a man of genius; but there is something uncanny about her, and letters and descriptions leave one with the impression that she was almost totally devoid of heart.

Shelley, with his views about marriage, blamed himself less on the score of leaving her—which was almost inevitable, considering their two natures—than on that of having ever married her, and "given rise to a premature independence of

[1] A letter of Shelley's, recently published in Murray's *Lord Byron's Correspondence*, and dated January 17, 1817, repeats the charge against Eliza of having partly caused her sister's death.

[2] Godwin's statement to Shelley that Harriet had been unfaithful to him some months before he left England with Mary has no available evidence to support it, and must therefore be left out of account.

duct in one unequal to the task."[1] The marriage had been ried on, both by Harriet and her sister, when Shelley was nere boy; but here, nevertheless, was where he was most ilty. The extraordinary view that he bore his heavy burden responsibility and remorse with comparative ease must be ue to his silence on the subject, and the mistake of supposing im unreserved. In his later life he was so only with regard o passing moods of feeling, and upon all subjects that deeply ffected him he usually said little or nothing—in prose. Peacock, who was throughout an advocate of Harriet, and a hard-headed judge not given to exaggeration, said "Harriet's untimely fate caused him deep agony of mind, which he felt the more because for a long time he kept it to himself." Hunt writes: "He never forgot it. For a time it tore his being to pieces." In Shelley's letter to Southey of June, 1820, protesting against slanders in the Reviews, he speaks of them as insulting "domestic calamities . . . to which, perhaps, their victim dares scarcely advert in thought."

Shelley and Mary started upon the year 1817 with very changed prospects. Within a fortnight of the news of Harriet's death they were married, under the approving eyes of the reconciled Godwin. This marriage and reconciliation must have made a great difference to their happiness; they were no longer outcasts. But the world had quarrel enough with them still. Opinions are even worse hated than acts, and during this year Proceedings in Chancery and the publication of the *Revolt of Islam* made Shelley's views notorious. Many of those who might have sought his friendship during this, his last year in England, stood aloof; while some who actually met him, like Lamb and Keats, were, either from temperament or unconscious prejudice, unattracted. But he felt no resent ment; his generous treatment of Keats is well known, and h could write to Hunt in September, 1819: "Of Lamb yo know my opinion, and you can bear witness to the regret whi I felt when I learned that the calumny of an enemy h deprived me of his society whilst in England."

During this year Shelley came for the last time, and m bitterly of all, into conflict with the demon he had been figh from his first entrance at Sion House School. He met it u its own grounds, and he was beaten; but he retired onl forge in the inspiring solitudes of Italy those weapon which alone Intolerance will ever be uprooted from the e

[1] Leigh Hunt in his *Autobiography*. There were, however, fe that Shelley had in the least affected Harriet's true charact opinions.

When he applied to the Westbrooks for his two children, Ianthe and Charles, as he did immediately after the news of Harriet's death, they were refused to him, and the question referred to the Court of Chancery. The Westbrooks, who do not seem to have shown any particular affection for the children, may merely have wished to keep a firm hold on the heirs to a great property, and in order to gain their end they raked out a copy of *Queen Mab*, given by Shelley to Harriet. This, and Shelley's irregular conduct, disqualified him, they maintained, for the task of educating his own children. For many months the issue was fought. To Shelley "almost all" except the happiness that Mary brought him seemed "suspended on the issue of this trial." Little by little it became plain that he was to be publicly denounced as unfit for the responsibilities of a father. By the end of the summer he even became alarmed lest William should be taken from him, and began to make plans for leaving England with his little family, soon to be increased by the addition of Clara, born in the early autumn. The final decision of Chancery left Ianthe and Charles to be educated by a clergyman and his wife, a man formally selected by Shelley, but on the condition that he should visit them only twelve times a year, and never speak to them alone. This was the sentence of the Lord Chancellor Eldon, to whom Shelley wrote his famous and furious lines. Technically, Lord Eldon's sentence can be excused, but Hazlitt had perhaps read him rightly when he said: "There has been no stretch of power attempted in his time that he has not seconded; no existing abuse so odious or so absurd that he has not sanctioned it. . . . In the whole of his public career, and with all the goodness of his disposition, he has not shown so small a drop of pity as a wren's eye." [1]

And was Shelley so fanatical and foolish when he saw everywhere the foul shapes of temporal and religious persecution—or, as he symbolized them, "Priest and King"?

"They have taken thy brother and sister dear,
They have made them unfit for thee;
They have withered the smile and dried the tear
Which should have been sacred to me
To a blighting faith and a cause of crime
They have bound them slaves in youthly prime,
And they will curse my name and thee
Because we fearless are and free" [2]

[1] See also Sidney Smith on Eldon, quoted by Trelawny in the *Records*, chap. xii.
[2] "*To William Shelley.*"

"I envy death the body," Shelley wrote in 1819, when his dear little William was dead, "far less than the oppressors the minds of those they have torn from me."

After this loss of his elder children he "never could trust himself," said Hunt, "to mention their names in my hearing, though I had stood at his side throughout the business." Thornton Hunt relates how once when Shelley was staying with his father, Leigh Hunt, and Shelley and the small boy had been romping together, in revenge for a teasing he cried out that he hoped his persecutor would be beaten in the Chancery suit, and have his children taken from him. "I was sitting on his knee, and as I spoke he let himself fall listlessly back in his chair, without attempting to conceal the shock I had given him. But presently he folded his arms round me and kissed me, and I perfectly understood that he saw how sorry I was, and was as anxious as I was to be friends again." [1]

The catastrophes of 1816 and the struggle in Chancery which occupied so much of 1817 would have filled an ordinary mind to the exclusion of all other enterprises. But Shelley had an indomitable fire of life; he could be a poet and a politician; a friend and a lover; sorrowful and joyous; feeble in health and a spring of vitality; a business man and a visionary, all by turns and almost simultaneously. During this summer from his home at Marlow he wrote the 5,000 lines of the *Revolt of Islam*, and issued also two pamphlets, a proposal for the Reform of the Electorate, and a protest against the public execution of three unfortunate working-class rebels. These two were almost his last political writings, but he redoubled his efforts in his private life to improve the conditions of the poor, from the epileptic woman he carried in his arms across Hampstead Heath, to the children and invalids of Marlow whom he visited continually, and supplied with blankets and other comforts.

In spite of his many troubles—among them very indifferent health—he seems to have been happier during this year than at any time previously. Matthew Arnold pointed out the curious fact that Mary, after her legal union with Shelley, "becomes attractive; up to her marriage her letters and journals do not please." The love between the two, who had lived as husband and wife for three years, seems closer and truer than ever before. Mary's letters are more simple and sincere. "How much do your letters console me when I am away from you!" Shelley writes to her from London: "Your letter

[1] Thornton is not in general a very reliable informant, but this is the sort of scene a child would remember, and a man would not invent.

to-day gave me the greatest delight; so soothing; so powerful and quiet are your expressions, that it is almost like folding you to my heart."

In the early summer Mary had finished *Frankenstein*. Her husband [illegible] all her [illegible] sponded [illegible] in himself seems also to have revived. In December, 1816, he had written to Hunt: "I am undeceived in the belief that I have powers deeply to interest, or substantially to improve, mankind." But it was only a few months later that he wrote *Islam*, in a mood of "unbounded and sustained enthusiasm." "My power consists in sympathy," he wrote to Godwin, "and that part of imagination which relates to sentiment and contemplation." Whatever else this curious sentence means, it shows that he was regaining a belief that he *had* powers. This year he wrote also *Prince Athanase* and portions of *Rosalind and Helen*, and the one fine sonnet *Ozymandias*.

Byron seems to have felt the preceding year that though [illegible] the poetry he wrote at Geneva the influence of his ideals. Hunt, so much older, so much more widely recognized, and caring but little for Shelley's poems, constituted his new friend his confidant and guide. "It is the most comical thing in the world," Shelley writes to Hunt in August, 1817, "you write accounts of your good behaviour to me as if I were some antient and wrinkled, but rather good-natured grand-uncle. Now this is a new feeling for me. I have been accustomed to consider myself as the most imprudent and [un]accountable of mankind." One other friend who realized this year the qualities of his character and genius both, was Horace Smith. Horace Smith was a humorist, but he had not given all over to laughter as Lamb—though a little ruefully and very tenderly—had; and he could recognize and revere one who, like Shelley, had given so much to the ideal that he had nothing left for mockery.

"O thou bold herald of announcements high,
No prostituted muse inspired thy story.
But Hope and Love lent thee their wings to fly
Forward into a coming age of glory."

The sonnet which opens with these lines was written by Smith early in 1818 to Shelley, before any of his greatest work had been done; so that Horace Smith was really perhaps the first man to

take the measure of his greatness, and realize that his wings would not fail him in his flight, nor the fire of his idealism burn cold.

But the flame needed something better than the winter mists of the Thames valley and the frigid disapprobation of the Georgian world to fan it. By October, Shelley and Mary had decided to travel to Italy. Shelley was suffering acute pain in his side, and was believed to be consumptive. He felt his life might depend on moving for a time to a warmer climate. In the spring of this year Byron's daughter by Clare Clairmont had been born, and was living with her mother in Shelley's house. Byron was prepared to receive his little daughter, and Shelley felt that no time should be lost in taking her out to him in Italy. He may have hoped that the child would reconcile Clare and Byron, now bitterly at variance.[1]

The Marlow house was sold in January, 1818, and the Shelleys moved to London in preparation for their voyage. These last few months in England were full of interests and pleasures. Shelley met several of Hunt's circle of literary acquaintances, went with Peacock to the opera, where he learnt to enjoy Mozart intensely, saw much of Hogg and Horace Smith, and read once more deeply and widely in the classics.

When they set sail from Dover on March 12, 1818, Shelley was entering once more upon a new life. This time he did not, as he usually did, take an eternal farewell, nor vow that his new abode was to be a fixed settled eternal home, and yet this time it happened that he was leaving England for ever.

Partly, at least, we may reproach our climate, and blame it upon the fogs that so great a son of England's greatness was driven on the very verge of his finest achievements to live among a people that were for the most part enslaved, priest-ridden and semi-barbarous, but who could offer him a "perpetual summer." But it was not only health he sought in Italy. Trelawny believed Shelley's peculiar attacks of pain, which certainly proved not to be consumption, but to which he was liable all through his life (though less towards the end), to be what moderns call nerves, "caused by the excessive and almost unremitting strain on his mental powers, the solitude of his life, and his long fasts . . . He had put his whole strength into his mind." Trelawny is probably right, for there is no other way of explaining the suddenness with which Shelley could become capable of extraordinary feats of endurance.

England had got on his nerves. The political slough of her affairs perpetually distracted him, and tempted him to abandon

[1] Later, when he realized Byron's attitude, he strongly urged Clare to keep the child with her.

poetry for futile pamphleteering. He had tried in vain to [illegible]

opposed. From Italy Shelley could do his best to help Godwin, without being quite so continually harassed by his laments and his money-lenders. In England to be sure there were poets—fellow-poets with himself in the great movement known as the Romantic Revival—but none of these men had seen the value of his work. Coleridge was going to pieces, and Wordsworth had changed his views—and as for their poems, he could, and did, read them in Italy. Byron was in Italy. In Italy there were no politics, the condition of the country was too bad even for politics; there was the Priest, the King, the Slave, the Sword, and memories of heroes old—those materials out of which Shelley liked to build his poetical generalizations. And in Italy there were the last monuments of the world that Greece had called to life. At heart more and more a Grecian,

ambition. But even his ethereal genius was perhaps a little starved upon such angels' food. Had the England of 1820 been more worthy of Shelley, he might have been more worthy of her. T[illegible] that few poets can dispense [illegible] perament so aloof, added t[illegible] for distant ages,"[1] that of [illegible]

Yet in some respects he became less solitary and less a stranger in the world from the first moment that he entered Italy. Italy did not and could not give him what England had failed to give, but she gave him everything else. "No sooner had we arrived in Italy than the loveliness of the earth and the serenity of the sky made the greatest difference in my sensations. I depend on these things for life; for in the smoke of cities, and the tumult of human kind and the chilling fogs and rain of our own country I can hardly be said to live."[2]

The poets of the Romantic Revival had all found, in very different ways, their inspiration in nature: to Wordsworth it was the voice of God. Keats, panting as the hart after the

[1] See Letter to Godwin, 1815.
[2] To Peacock, April, 1818.

water brooks of the beautiful, found there his refuge. But Shelley was "made one with Nature":

> "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is,
> Be thou me, impetuous one!"

And her lyre he surely is. Disappointed in some degree both with society and individuals, he sought perfection where alone it is—in the sights and sounds of nature; and "interpenetrated" by the glory of the Italian sky, he wrote his perfect lyrics:

> "Palace-roof of cloudless nights!
> Paradise of golden lights!
> Deep, immeasurable, vast,
> Which art now, and which wert then
> Of the Present and the Past,
> Of the eternal Where and When,
> Presence-chamber, temple, home,
> Ever-canopying dome,
> Of acts and ages yet to come!"

In the autumn of 1818 there was lounging and "cultivating" at Naples a youth named Charles MacFarlane, whose reminis- cences, after lying for two generations in MSS. in an old shop have been recently recovered and published.[1] One fine morning this youth "standing and admirin perhaps for the hundredth time, that exquisite antique stat of a Roman matron . . . was startled by an English vo . . ." and turned to see "an unmistakable and m interesting-looking English gentleman, in appearance not m than five or six and twenty. There was not much in the ren he had uttered, as if unconsciously; it referred to the g fulness of the statue; it was little more than a truis commonplace, but of that sort of commonplace which i heard from the vulgar; and the tone of voice with wh was delivered struck me as peculiarly soft and touching speaker was very evidently in delicate health; he wa thin, and would have been very pale but for a little f the upper edge of the cheek; his eye was rather su hollow, but at the same time uncommonly quick, brilli glancing; his hair was long and wavy, curling na the expression of the countenance melancholy, but a m frequently irradiated with liveliness and even with j Though negligently, he was neatly if not elegantly He never could have been taken for anything b thoroughbred English gentleman, though there we peculiarities about him. We fell into talk, just as

[1] Reminiscences of a Literary Life. Murray.

water brooks of the beautiful, found there his refuge. But Shelley was "made one with Nature":

"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is,
Be thou me, impetuous one!"

And her lyre he surely is. Disappointed in some degree both with society and individuals, he sought perfection where alone it is—in the sights and sounds of nature; and "interpenetrated" by the glory of the Italian sky, he wrote his perfect lyrics:

"Palace-roof of cloudless nights!
Paradise of golden lights!
Deep, immeasurable, vast,
Which art now, and which wert then
Of the Present and the Past,
Of the eternal Where and When,
Presence-chamber, temple, home,
Ever-canopying dome,
Of acts and ages yet to come!"

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One fine morning this youth "standing and admiring, perhaps for the hundredth time, that exquisite antique statue of a Roman matron . . . was startled by an English voice . . ." and turned to see "an unmistakable and most interesting-looking English gentleman, in appearance not more than five or six and twenty. There was not much in the remark he had uttered, as if unconsciously; it referred to the gracefulness of the statue; it was little more than a truism or commonplace, but of that sort of commonplace which is not heard from the vulgar; and the tone of voice with which it was delivered struck me as peculiarly soft and touching. The speaker was very evidently in delicate health; he was very thin, and would have been very pale but for a little flush at the upper edge of the cheek; his eye was rather sunken or hollow, but at the same time uncommonly quick, brilliant, and glancing; his hair was long and wavy, curling naturally; the expression of the countenance melancholy, but a melancholy frequently irradiated with liveliness and even with joyfulness. Though negligently, he was neatly if not elegantly dressed. He never could have been taken for anything but a true thoroughbred English gentleman, though there were personal peculiarities about him. We fell into talk, just as if we had

[1] *Reminiscences of a Literary Life.* Murray.

been old acquaintances." On returning from the museum with his "delightful unknown," MacFarlane met some Italians whom he knew. "Who is your friend?" asked one of them after they had separated. MacFarlane confessed that he did not know. "Why, I thought from your greetings," returned the other, "that you were brothers or first cousins." "Your friend looked very much like a man of genius," said another acquaintance; "that's a face one cannot easily forget." Somehow this little story in convincing—Shelley talking aloud to himself about the statue: his strange and attractive appearance: his impulsive readiness to make friends. The next day he met MacFarlane again and drove with him to Pompeii.[1] When they had explored the ruins "Shelley

[1] MacFarlane is very circumstantial about this drive, but there are difficulties. These difficulties car [illegible] the supposition that Shelley visit [illegible] saw two theatres. . . ." That is to say, he entered by the Porta di Stabia—by the barracks of the Roman soldiers. Moreover Shelley [illegible] their *exit* by the "eastern [illegible] eet of Tombs is just outside [illegible] ern" to be a mere slip of [illegible] fruit and *wine* in la Casa di [illegible] the [illegible] men [illegible] the [illegible] wou [illegible] would then be the first *visit*. Against this must be urged Shelley's note to the *Ode to Naples* which runs: "The Author has connected many recollections [illegible] by [illegible] at [illegible] to [illegible] Shelley says: [illegible] which naturally suggests t[illegible] as if Shelley had been alo[illegible] the first time that evening, after their excursion. (In her poem "The Choice" Mary speaks of William Shelley as having been taken to Pompeii) Shelley never mentions MacFarlane at all The probability is, unfortunately—for it detracts from our interest in MacFarlane [illegible] wh[illegible] no[illegible] [illegible] went with him at all, nor visited [illegible] hesitate to accept the statement [illegible] poem on that very occasion!).

proposed that we should take a nearer view of the castle, and go down to the beach. This we did, and sat on a lava rock, with the sea almost washing our feet, until sunset. The overpowering beauty of the place, the time and tide, subdued us into a solemn, musing, meditative, and long silence.

"We spoke not a word, and other sound there was none except the rippling and plashing of that tideless, tranquil sea, as its waters creamed, in a long curving line, on the smooth sands, or gently struck the blocks of ancient lava which lie rather thickly in that part of the bay.

" . . . My companion's expressive countenance was languid, despondent, melancholy, quite sad. He did not write them here—he certainly wrote nothing when I was with him, and was not the man to indulge in any such poetical affectations; but he *thought* here those thrilling verses which in the collection of his minor poems are called *Stanzas, written in dejection, near Naples.* Some of those lines, ever since I first read them, have haunted me . . . and . . . the image of Shelley as he sat on that seashore, with the glowing sunset shining full on his pale, haggard face.

" . . . His own 'Sensitive Plant' was not so sensitive, so impressionable, as Shelley himself. He was all over feeling, and all his feelings were of the acutest sort. Had he not been drowned as he was, he never could have lasted; the bright, sharp sword had already outworn the scabbard. Twice when, without being observed, I looked earnestly at him, I read on his countenance, and in the whole of his delicate, excited frame, the words, 'Death, early death!' Yet—and because he was so impressionable, so thoroughly alive to external nature—we had scarcely got back to our very queer and very rapid conveyance than he rallied, joked in good Italian with our driver, and became most cheerful and facetious."

Here then is a picture of Shelley in the winter of 1818–19 after nine glorious months of Italy's scenery and art; and we may ask, is he any happier?—is he any different? Friendly, enthusiastic, excitable, fragile, moody, reflective, melancholy, restless: is this not the very same feverish creature whose wild steps we have been following through so many strange adventures? Is he destined ever to reach his goal? Is he not, as many people have felt, a being incapable of organic growth: changing and reforming like a crystal, but adding no new character to the kaleidoscopic circle of his moods? And if we look on ahead we might seem to see but repetitions of his old experiences; in and out of love with Emilia Viviani as suddenly as with Miss Hitchener of old; capable of express-

ing in a letter to a friend—even though it were only once—that Mary was not wholly satisfactory to him; capable of being so tender, and sometimes so harsh; and everlastingly seeking peace and calm, and finding none of it.

In the darkest days of 1814 he had looked for peace *only* in the grave.[1] But in 1816 he is praying again for calm.[2] In 1818 he concludes the Poem in the Euganean Hills with a visionary haven where he shall find peace and joy, and in the *Stanzas written in Dejection*, confesses to having neither. In 1819 he writes the beautiful fragment lamenting the brevity of those "Gentle Visitations of Calm Thought." In 1821 his soul's fever breaks into the deliriously beautiful music of:

"Far, far away, O ye
Halcyons of Memory,
Seek some far calmer nest
Than this abandoned breast!
No news of your false spring
To my heart's winter bring,
Once having gone, in vain
Ye come again."

And once more, echoing the lines of 1814:[3]

"The crane o'er seas and forests seeks her home;
No bird so wild but has its quiet nest,
When it no more would roam;
The sleepless billows on the ocean's breast
Break like a bursting heart, and die in foam,
And thus at length find rest:
Doubtless there is a place of peace
Where *my* weak heart and all its throbs will cease."

And last of all, in 1822, comes the confession

"Less oft is peace in Shelley's mind,
Than calm in waters, seen."

It might almost appear as if those people were justified—and Tennyson seems to have been among them—who have held that Shelley had already exhausted his powers of life and poetry when his early death removed him.

And yet only those who have altogether failed to realize the vas[illegible] planet[illegible] long ag[illegible]

[1] *Lines* written at Bracknell—"Thou in the grave shalt rest."
[2] *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.*
[3] From the Poem to *Edward Williams*: a poem which, in spite of some beautiful passages, must have been the fruit of a very weak mood, as the poet seems himself to be aware.

perpetual movement and life. There is enough imaginative energy in *Adonais* alone to feed the poetic fires of a lifetime, while to see no development in his character during those last seven years, argues a curious blindness. Restless, because unsatisfied, he may have been to the last; but what a gulf there is in depth of feeling and spiritual experience between the glorious mystical fervour of *Epipsychidion*—a fervour he soon recognized as being the soul's search for "what is perhaps eternal"—and the passage, for instance, about the Indian maiden in *Alastor*. It is his heart more than anything else that has changed: we can see it as well in his life as in his poetry. The early letters to Mary were eloquent and touching; but in the later ones there is a simple, protective manly affection which in the first we missed. It is the same with his friendships. He is in reality no less enthusiastic and devoted than in the days when he wrote his daily and hourly epistles to Hogg—but he has so much more to offer: he is so considerate in his sympathy, and so modest in giving counsel, and yet so certain of himself, and of his right to advise and comfort and sustain. The change has affected his political opinions and altered above all his whole attitude towards men's religious experiences. The noble fragmentary *Essay on Christianity* is still frequently omitted from his prose works, and forgotten. In it Shelley interprets Christ's vision of heaven, and writes: "How magnificent is the conception which this bold theory suggests to the contemplation, even if it be no more than the imagination of some sublimest and most holy poet, who, impressed with the loveliness and majesty of his own nature, is impatient and discontented with the narrow limits which this imperfect life and the dark grave have assigned for ever as his melancholy portion." It is after this manner that Shelley himself was in these last years impatient, discontented, and melancholy: he consoled himself by being more and more "aware of benignant visitings from the invisible energies" by which he was surrounded. "Whosoever is free from the contamination of luxury and licence, may go forth to the fields and to the woods, inhaling joyous renovation from the breath of spring, or catching from the odours and sounds of autumn some diviner mood of sweetest sadness which improves the softened heart. Whosoever is no deceiver or destroyer of his fellow-men—no liar, no flatterer, no murderer—may walk among his species, deriving, from the communion with all which they contain of beautiful or of majestic, some intercourse with the Universal God." Unspotted indeed by any such contamination, singularly free from evil thoughts

against his fellows, Shelley found in the fields and woods of Italy his own communion with the Highest. "Whosoever," he goes on, "is that which he designs to become, and only aspires to that which the divinity of his own nature shall consider and approve—he has already seen God." How should we dare to say that if he had lived longer he might not have seen God after this manner, and have revealed Him to us even more clearly than he has done? Shelley was indeed remarkable in the steadfastness of his designs and aspirations.

The history of his last years is a history of great inspirations: the beauty of sea and sky; the memories of Ancient Greece and Rome; the lovely illusion, Emilia Viviani; the tragedy of Keats's death: such things he felt, "to the finest fibre of his nature." To realize them and turn them into poetry was his life: and it must have been a life full of profound, if solitary, joy.

> "Few, few are they, beyond conception blest,
> Whose native speech is thy melodious strain"—

This joy of creation was only marred by repeated doubts whether poetry was indeed his native speech. His natural modesty, the repeated failures of his early career and his persistent unpopularity as a poet gave rise to these fears: and he suffered from them deeply, though probably less deeply than Keats. Keats staked his happiness on poetry in a manner unusual in the annals of literature for literary men have as a rule loved life better than literature. Consequently any doubt of his powers was a stab to the heart for Keats. Shelley suffered more through disappointed idealism and baffled philanthropy when he believed that he was not born to influence and help his fellow-men. When one work after another of his had slid into a dishonoured obscurity, he was forced sometimes to wonder whether the light *could* come into the world, and the world know it not.[1] But while he was at work no such doubts, or any such reflection, can ever have clouded his imagination. He wrote with passionate conviction, and sometimes with abandonment. His wide reading—Calderon, Dante, the Greeks, Shakespeare—filled him with [illegible]

with intense experiences.

As soon as they arrived in Italy in April, 1818, Shelley seems to have taken possession of that fair country as his

[1] Letter to Horace Smith, May, 1822.

birthright. His first plan was to settle on the Lake of Como, and he applied for the lease of no humbler a palace—though it was "half in ruins"—than the Villa Pliniana, situated amidst the finest scenery among cypresses and waterfalls; and in the courtyard of which was a fountain described by the younger Pliny. They either failed to afford this poet's paradise, or Mary shrank from its wildness and discomfort. "You may easily conjecture," he writes to Peacock, "the motives which led us to forgo the divine solitude of Como. To me, whose chief pleasure in life is the contemplation of nature, you may imagine how great is this loss." He soon consoled himself, however, at the Baths of Lucca, near Pisa, where they spent the summer. The blinding heat and fierce summer skies were all pleasure to Shelley. "I take great delight," he writes, "in watching the changes of the atmosphere here, and the growth of the thunder showers with which the noon is often overshadowed, and which break and fade away towards evening into flocks of delicate clouds. Our fireflies[1] are fading away fast; but there is the planet Jupiter, who rises majestically on the right in the forest-covered mountains to the south, and the pale summer lightning which is spread out every night, at intervals, over the sky. No doubt Providence has contrived these things that, when the fireflies go out, the low-flying owl may see her way home."[2] . . . "In the evening Mary and I often take a ride, for horses are cheap in this country. In the middle of the day, I bathe in a pool or fountain, formed in the middle of the forests by a torrent. It is surrounded on all sides by precipitous rocks, and the waterfall of the stream which forms it falls into it on one side with perpetual dashing. . . . The water of this pool . . . is as transparent as the air, so that the stones and sand at the bottom seem, as it were, trembling in the light of noonday. It is exceedingly cold also. My custom is to undress, and sit on the rocks, reading Herodotus, until the perspiration has subsided, and then to leap from the edge of the rock into this fountain—a practice in the hot weather excessively refreshing. This torrent is composed, as it were, of a succession of pools and waterfalls, up which I sometimes amuse myself by climbing when I bathe, and receiving the spray over all my body, whilst I clamber up the moist crags with difficulty."[3]

[1] A poem of Shelley's on a "Firefly" was written, Hunt says, to welcome him to Italy in 1822 (see *Autobiography*, chap. xxi). It is also mentioned by Mary. There seems to be no other trace of it. Did Hunt "unfortunately mislay it" as he did his copy of *Alastor*?

[2] July 10, 1818. [3] July 25, 1818.

Such a life could not fail to prepare his spirit for new enterprises. His genius needed regular periods of lying fallow, and his creative years were usually separated by years, or months, of comparative rest. But he was quite unaware of what was happening within him, and seems to have been rather depressed that he was writing nothing. He continues this letter by saying: "I have lately found myself totally incapable of original composition. I employed my mornings, therefore, in translating the *Symposium*, which I accomplished in ten days. . . . I have been reading scarcely anything but Greek, and a little Italian poetry with Mary." Brooding over Plato, and reading "scarcely anything but Greek," he was in reality feeding the fire with its favourite fuel. And within [illegible] he has composed [illegible]

In the early autumn he had set off to visit Byron at Venice. He took Clare with him, eager to see her child, who had been now for some months in Byron's custody. For her sake Shelley went to ask this favour of Byron, now plunged in debaucheries. He won his way; Byron was never able to repulse him when they were face to face. Allegra was allowed to visit her mother at Este, near Venice, and Mary and her two children arrived shortly afterwards. But Mary's baby, Clara, was taken ill on the journey, and died in a few days. Shelley felt this loss mainly on Mary's account, for the baby was too young to have meant very much to him as yet; but his spirits were naturally overcast; in *Julian and Maddalo*, written at Este, there is something of that morbid melancholy which was his worst enemy. Mary Shelley says that he was struggling with ill health at the time, and that may partly account for the lugubrious subject of the poem, and also perhaps for the dejection of the *Lines written near Naples* a few months later. The *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* are sad, but with a very different sadness. The philosopher and philanthropist, the nature lover and the visionary, are wonderfully blended in this beautiful poem—perhaps the most finished work that he had yet produced.

In November the little party—Shelley, Mary, William and Clare—set out towards the south. After a short visit to Rome they settled for the winter at Naples (where Shelley met MacFarlane). In the early spring they returned to Rome and remained there till the summer. Some idea of the impression made upon Shelley by these places—by the Roman Coliseum, the Baths of Caracalla, Vesuvius, Pompeii and Baiae—may be

gathered from his magnificent descriptive letters to Peacock. But their deepest effects are seen in his poetry.

Whether Keats and Shelley were either of them really in touch with Greek thought and feeling is open to question; but a passionate love of Greece—perhaps of a purely imaginary Greece—was their chief source of inspiration. Keats turned his back upon the political and social murk of his times, that he might fix his eyes upon the ancient world where Beauty had seemed to dwell in fullness. Shelley looked before and after, and saw in a visionary Greece the ideal of the future and the light of the past:

> " Another Athens shall arise,
> And to remoter time
> Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
> The splendour of its prime;
> And leave if aught so bright may live
> All Earth can take or Heaven can give."

The more he loved nature and abandoned himself to the influence of the timeless beauty and calm of the Italian seas and skies—skies that dream over vanished cities, " crystalline streams" that coil among fallen pillars as white as their own foam—the more he loved Greece.

> " Arethusa arose
> From her couch of snows
> In the Acroceraunian mountains—"

Not the Grecian Muse herself perhaps—but " o matre pulchra filia pulchrior."

It was towards the end of January that Shelley paid the visit to Pompeii of which he wrote an account to Peacock. Having described the magnificent scene, he continues: " This scene was what the Greeks beheld (Pompeii, you know, was a Greek city). They lived in harmony with nature; and the interstices of their incomparable columns were portals, as it were, to admit the spirit of beauty which animates this glorious universe to visit those whom it inspired. If such is Pompeii, what was Athens?" And later in the same letter, speaking of the amphitheatre, he says: " I now understand why the Greeks were such great poets; and, above all, I can account, it seems to me, for the harmony, the unity, the perfection, the uniform excellence, of all their works of art. They lived in a perpetual commerce with external nature, and nourished themselves upon the spirit of its forms. Their theatres were all open to the mountains and the sky. Their columns, the ideal types of a sacred forest, with its roof of interwoven tracery,

admitted the light and wind; the odour and the freshness of the country penetrated the cities. Their temples were mostly upaithric; and the flying clouds, the stars, or the deep sky, were seen above. O, but for that series of wretched wars which terminated in the Roman conquest of the world; but for the Christian religion, which put the finishing stroke on the ancient system; but for those changes that conducted Athens to its ruin—to what an eminence might not humanity have arrived!"

When they moved to Rome in February, Shelley spent much time among statues and pictures—and in the vast and flowery labyrinths of the ruined Baths of Caracalla wrote the second and third acts of *Prometheus Unbound*.

His taste both in pictures and statues was certainly far from classical, and his comments are surprising and sometimes amusing. Perhaps there is a trace in his judgments of that curious, almost feminine dislike of the powerful, which he seems to have felt was by nature irreconcilable with gentleness and grace. And yet one cannot help sympathizing a little—not with his sweeping disparagement of all Michael Angelo's work, but with his comment on the painting in the Sixtine Chapel, "Jesus Christ is like an angry pot-boy, and God like an old alehouse-keeper looking out of window."

As soon as the third Act of *Prometheus Unbound* was finished, he embarked upon the *Cenci*. In doing so he was probably actuated partly by motives of self-discipline. "Those writings which I have hitherto published," he says in his dedication to Leigh Hunt, "have been little else than visions which impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just. I can also perceive in them the literary defects incidental to youth and impatience; they are dreams of what ought to be or may be. The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been." But Shelley's heart was not a good instrument for the creation of sad realities. In some fragmentary passages intended for the Preface to *Adonais* he says: "the *Cenci* . . . was written rather to try my powers, than to unburthen my full heart." He finished it in a few months, and it is a witness at least to the astonishing fertility, energy and brilliance of his mind.

In the midst of this year of almost ceaseless composition, Shelley's beloved child William died suddenly at Rome. Rome in June was hardly a healthy spot for a child of three years old, and one cannot help wondering that parents who had

already lost one child from the dangers of the Italian climate, should have risked the only one remaining to them. It is true that they were planning to leave Rome on his account when he was taken ill—but it was too late; and his father's agonized watching for sixty unbroken hours beside his bed, could not save him. Shelley was deeply shaken, but Mary was crushed, and was unable to realize, if one may judge from her letters and diaries, how deeply her husband shared in their common misfortune. Clare, who had a capacity for true devotion and had been very fond of William, watched and suffered with them. William was buried in the English cemetery at Rome of which Shelley had written, it "is the most beautiful and solemn cemetery I ever beheld," and near which he was himself to lie. Soon after they left Rome and settled at Livorno, in order to be near the Gisbornes, with whom they had already the preceding year formed a close friendship. Here they lived during the summer months, and from a glass-roofed tower, at the top of the house, in radiating August heat (as also later from wintry Florence) Shelley's spirit itself radiated forth in a hundred different interests and undertakings. Political events, from his passionate concern with the fate of man, he could never be indifferent to. His letters are full of references to political movements, in England and elsewhere, and in this year, though he was producing such an astonishing mass of pure poetry, he found time to write six shorter political poems, besides *Peter Bell the Third* and the *Mask of Anarchy* which he composed in an outburst of "indignation and compassion" on receiving the news of the Manchester Massacre.

All this time he read as vigorously as he wrote. "I have of late read little Greek," he tells Hogg. "I have read Homer again and some plays of Æschylus and Sophocles, and some lives of Plutarch this spring—that is all." This is *all* because Mrs. Gisborne has been teaching him Spanish and he has been devouring the plays of Calderon. "My employments," he writes to Peacock from Livorno, "are these: I awaken usually at seven, read half an hour; then get up; breakfast; after breakfast ascend *my tower*, and read and write until two. Then we dine. After dinner I read Dante with Mary, gossip a little, eat grapes and figs, sometimes walk, tho' seldom, and at half-past five pay a visit to Mrs. Gisborne, who reads Spanish with me till supper-time." And Shelley never took a favour, but he repaid it tenfold. Mrs. Gisborne had a son by her first marriage, Henry Reveley—a young man clever at engineering, but somewhat illiterate. Shelley, in the most delicate manner, undertook to correspond with him and teach

him how to express himself; and at the same time, to quote Mary's account: "set on foot the building of a steamboat to ply between Marseilles, Genoa, and Leghorn. Such an enterprise promised fortune to his friend, who undertook to build it, and the anticipation filled him with delight. Unfortunately an unforeseen complication of circumstances caused the design to be abandoned, when already far advanced towards completion." To forward this project Shelley sent considerable sums of money and wrote and meditated about "Great screws and cones, and wheels and grooved blocks."

In his own home he had many claims also upon his help and sympathy. Clare, with her moods and troubles, needed perpetual help—whether she were away, or in his own house, restless and unhappy about Allegra, concerning whom Shelley [illegible] for help. "Mary's spirits," he writes to Hunt,[1] "continue dreadfully depressed, and I cannot expose her to Godwin in this state. I wrote to this hard-hearted person (the first letter I had written for a year), on account of the terrible state of her mind, and entreated him to try to soothe her in his next letter. The *very* next letter, and addressed to her, called her husband (me) 'a disgraceful and flagrant person'—tried to persuade her that I was under great engagements to give him *more* money (after having given him £4,700), and urged her if she ever wished a connexion to continue between him and her to force me to get money for him. He cannot persuade her that I am what I am not, nor place a shade of enmity between her and me—but he heaps on her misery, still misery. I have not yet shown her the letter, but I must." It was Godwin's behaviour to Mary more than anything else that finally destroyed the affection Shelley had preserved for him through many trials.

In November, in Florence, Mary and Shelley were both comforted by the birth of a son. "Poor Mary," he writes to Hunt, "begins (for the first time) to look a little consoled; for we have spent, as you may imagine, a miserable five months." A miserable five months—and yet here he is in Florenc writing his *Ode to the West Wind*, in the Cascini Gardens; an adding the rapturous fourth act to his *Prometheus*. "I lik the Cascini very much," he writes to the Gisbornes, "where often walk alone, watching the leaves and the rising and fallin

[1] August 15, 1819.

of the Arno. I am full of all kinds of literary plans." And in the very same letter he declares, "I have deserted the odorous gardens of literature to journey across the sandy desert of politics; not as you may imagine, without the hope of finding some enchanted paradise"—and this means that he was preparing his *Philosophical View of Reform.*

To these activities and creations of this single year of Shelley's life we must add many short poems, among them those wonderful lyrics *The Ode to Heaven*, *The Indian Serenade*, and the little poem about Poets and Chameleons. We must reflect that in all the strain of such rapid creation he had practically no encouragement at all: "Poets' food is love and fame"—and he never even expected his *Prometheus*, which he believed "the best thing I ever wrote" to sell beyond twenty copies.[1] We must include in the mass of his output the long and entertaining letters he wrote in rapid succession to the friends in England he never for a moment forgot. And we must remember, that though this was the most productive year of his life, it was not the year in which he wrote *Adonais*, *Epipsychidion* or the *Defence of Poetry*. Surely we shall then recognize that Shelley had a combination of genius with a rich, generous and versatile nature such as few other English poets have possessed. A genius that could not be exhausted in the short half of a lifetime! "They say that 'My chariot wheels are broken.' Heaven forbid! My chariot, you may tell them, was built by one of the best makers in Bond Street, and it has gone several thousand miles in perfect security." [2]

Early in 1820 the Shelleys left Florence for Pisa, and that quiet old town upon its sandy plains became their most permanent home. Nearly all the two and a half years remaining to Shelley were spent there, and a little group of friends soon gathered themselves about him. In the course of the summer the Gisbornes went for a visit to England, and as a result, the steamboat project was abandoned.[3] Their place

[1] To his Publisher Ollier, March 6, 1820.

[2] Shelley to Ollier, referring to a review of his poems in the *Quarterly*.

[3] When the Gisbornes first went to England, Shelley urged that, if it should seem to be in Henry Reveley's interest to remain there, the steamboat project *should* be abandoned. But after they returned again to Italy, we find him furiously indignant against them. Professor Dowden can only explain this by references to Godwin's description of Shelley's temper as violent and resentful. But Shelley was never so erratic and unreasonable as his idolators make him out, and the explanation would seem to be this: the Gisbornes *returned*, and according to Shelley wanted to put the engine to some other and inferior use; and he may naturally have thought, since Reveley's interests *had*

—or rather Mrs. Gisborne's, for it was she that Shelley and Mary valued—was filled to some extent by a Mrs. Mason, whom Shelley describes in a letter to Hunt, adding: "You will think it my fate either to find or to imagine some lady of forty-five, very unprejudiced and philosophical, who has entered deeply into the best and selectest spirit of the age, with enchanting manners, and a disposition rather to like me, in every town that I inhabit. But certainly such this lady is." Towards the end of the summer Shelley's cousin Medwin came for a visit of some months. He eventually proved a bit of a bore, but his genuine interest in literature and "cheerful conversation" made him for a time an acceptable companion. It is to him that we owe most of our knowledge of this period of the poet's life. They met in Pisa, and Medwin returned with Shelley to the baths of San Giuliano, where he and his family had been spending the hot months. "It was nearly seven years," writes Medwin, "since we had parted, but I should immediately have recognized him in a crowd. His figure was emaciated, and somewhat bent; his hair, still profuse, and curling naturally, was partially interspersed with grey, as he says in *Alastor*, 'sered by the autumn of strange suffering'; but his appearance was youthful, and his countenance, whether grave or animated, strikingly intellectual. There was also a purity and freshness in his complexion that he never lost."

Shelley's life at this time was very full of troubles and anxieties, and Medwin seems to have felt deeply for him. In October, Clare went away to Florence as a governess, and Mary was very naturally relieved. But Shelley was truly fond of Clare, and as she was not happy in her situation, he missed her all the more. His letters to her are very touching in their affectionate and anxious tone—their remonstrances against her moodiness and lack of faith in his affection, their exhortations to take care of her health and be good—"I wish to Heaven, my dear girl," he writes, "that *I* could be of any avail to add to your pleasures or diminish your pain—how ardently you cannot know; you only know, as you frequently take care to tell me, how vainly." He suffered a good deal from the fact that Mary and Clare were none too good friends, but he knew well where the fault lay, and tr[illegible] Mary's

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of the Arno. I am full of all kinds of literary plans." And in the very same letter he declares, "I have deserted the odorous gardens of literature to journey across the sandy desert of politics; not as you may imagine, without the hope of finding some enchanted paradise"—and this means that he was preparing his *Philosophical View of Reform.*

To these activities and creations of this single year of Shelley's life we must add many short poems, among them those wonderful lyrics *The Ode to Heaven, The Indian Serenade,* and the little poem about Poets and Chameleons. We must reflect that in all the strain of such rapid creation he had practically no encouragement at all: "Poets' food is love and fame"—and he never even expected his *Prometheus,* which he believed "the best thing I ever wrote" to sell beyond twenty copies.[1] We must include in the mass of his output the long and entertaining letters he wrote in rapid succession to the friends in England he never for a moment forgot. And we must remember, that though this was the most productive year of his life, it was not the year in which he wrote *Adonais, Epipsychidion* or the *Defence of Poetry.* Surely we shall then recognize that Shelley had a combination of genius with a rich, generous and versatile nature such as few other English poets have possessed. A genius that could not be exhausted in the short half of a lifetime! "They say that 'My chariot wheels are broken.' Heaven forbid! My chariot, you may tell them, was built by one of the best makers in Bond Street, and it has gone several thousand miles in perfect security." [2]

Early in 1820 the Shelleys left Florence for Pisa, and that quiet old town upon its sandy plains became their most permanent home. Nearly all the two and a half years remaining to Shelley were spent there, and a little group of friends soon gathered themselves about him. In the course of the summer the Gisbornes went for a visit to England, and as a result, the steamboat project was abandoned.[3] Their place

[1] To his Publisher Ollier, March 6, 1820.

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strength while he pitied Clare's weakness. "I am trying to persuade Mary to ask your pardon," he remarks on one occasion; "I hope that I shall succeed. In the meantime, as you were in the wrong you had better not ask hers, for that is unnecessary; but write to her—if you had been in the right you would have done so." "Mary, though ill, is good," he concludes another letter. "And how are you?"

And there were other and more serious claims upon his philosophy. In the years 1820 and 1821 a scoundrel of an Italian servant, formerly in his employment, circulated outrageous scandals about him and succeeded in convincing several persons of their truth. When Shelley went to stay with Byron at Ravenna in 1821, Byron disclosed them to him. "As to what Reviews and the world says," he wrote to Mary, "I do not care a jot," but he felt he could not learn to despise the belief of persons who had known and seen him, that he was guilty of crimes. Yet he soon overcame even this, and "regained the indifference which the opinion of anything or anybody, except our own consciousness, amply merits."

A vile attack on his private life which had appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, and which he thought was written by Southey, led to a correspondence in which he showed himself as strong as he was sensitive. Southey was not responsible for the article in question, but he took the opportunity, in answering Shelley's letter, to accuse him of bringing misery on others by his opinions, and guilt almost irremediable upon himself. "You say you judge of opinions by the fruits," Shelley wrote in the course of his reply; "so do I, but by their remote and permanent fruits—such fruits of rash judgment as Christianity seems to have produced in you. The immediate fruits of all new opinions are indeed calamity to the promulgators and professors; but we are the end of nothing, and it is in acting well, in contempt of present advantage, that virtue consists. . . . I cannot hope that you will be candid enough to feel, or if you feel, to own, that you have done ill in accusing, even in your own mind, an innocent and a persecuted man whose only real offence is the holding of opinions something similar to those which you once held respecting the existing state of society."

And then there was Godwin—he had written in such a strain of desperation to Mary that he had almost made her ill, and as she was nursing her baby she had authorized Shelley to intercept the letters—all which made Godwin furious, Shelley unhappy, and Mary helplessly anxious. Writing to the Gisbornes in June, 1820, about some little child at Naples

in whom he was interested, but of whom nothing more is known, he says: "My poor Neapolitan, I hear she has a severe fever of dentition—I suppose she will die and leave another memory to those which already torture me. . . . What remains to me? Domestic peace and fame? You will laugh when you hear me talk of the latter; indeed it is only a shadow. The seeking of a sympathy with the unborn and the unknown is a feeble mood [? mode] of allaying the love within us; and even that is beyond the grasp of so weak an aspirant as I. Domestic peace I might have—I may have —if I see you I shall have—but have not, for Mary suffers dreadfully about the state of Godwin's circumstances." Godwin muddled through, partly with the help of Mary's *Valperga*, the labour of many months; on this he raised £400, and in consequence a better relationship with the Shelleys was restored.

The winter of 1820 was in all these respects a trying time, and Shelley wrote little. He was very delicate in health,[1] and Medwin says that he was often in the greatest pain, "though he was never querulous or out of temper, never by an irritable word hurt the feelings of those about him." Medwin was much affected by his cousin's moods of deep melancholy, which he attributed partly to ill health, but also very largely to the sad events of his past life, to his solitary existence, and to the failure of his writings. During part of his visit Medwin was ill, and passed the time reading Shelley's works. "The delight they afforded me," he says, "often disarmed pain. . . . He was surprised at my enthusiasm and said to me—'I am disgusted with writing, and were it not for an irresistible impulse should discontinue so doing.'" Fortunately in this irresistible impulse his happiness lay, as Medwin soon perceived. "And yet," writes Medwin—in his own peculiar style—"with all his despondency at the neglect of the world—his distraction of mind at the attacks of his implacable enemies, one may conceive the intense enjoyment he must have experienced at creations such as the *Prometheus Unbound*, in the outpouring of his *Ode to Liberty*, or the improvisation of the fanciful and imaginative *Witch of Atlas*. Self-absorbed, luxuriating in a world of his own, he annihilated matter and time. . . . Even his sorrows (and who suffered more?) were but drops in the crucible—the sad mesh of

[1] There are constant references to health in the letters: "What pleasure it gives me," he writes to Clare, "to hear that you are well; health is the greatest possession, health of body and mind—as the writer, weak enough in both, too well knows." February, 1821.

humanity—and his poetical alchemy drew from them one of infinite purity and beauty." Poetry and nature formed indeed a world where Shelley led a second and quite separate existence, as serene as the other was stormy. "Sometimes," Medwin says, "his features, that bore the impress of suffering, might have been false interpreters of the state of his mind, and his spirit might be lost in reverie; of which state it has been well said, that those subject to it are dissolved into the surrounding atmosphere, or feel as if the surrounding atmosphere were dissolved into their being. Something of this, I have more than once remarked in Shelley, as we stood watching from my open window the sunsets of Pisa, which are gorgeous beyond any I have ever witnessed; when the waters, the sky, and the marble palaces that line the magnificent crescent of the Lung' Arno, were glowing with crimson—the river a flood of molten gold. On such occasions, after one of these reveries, he would forget himself, lost in admiration, and exclaim, 'What a glorious world! There is after all something worth living for. This makes me retract the wish that I had never been born.'" The poems of the early part of 1820 were singularly joyful, and animated by this intense delight in nature: the *Witch of Atlas*, *The Cloud*, the *Hymn of Apollo*, the *Hymn of Pan*, and *Arethusa*, are among them, and the *Skylark*, which though it contains saddest thoughts, is yet, like nearly all Shelley's greatest lyrics, full of unbodied joy.

The habits of Shelley's life as Medwin describes them, seem to have changed little since his days with Hogg at Oxford. We find him reading in the streets, and at meals—hopelessly irregular about sleeping and eating. "So little impression did that which constitutes one of the main delights of ordinary mortals make on him, that he sometimes asked 'Mary, have I dined?' Wine he never drank." His favourite beverages were water and tea. "Let not my readers imagine," says Medwin, "that he was always dejected or despondent: at times he was as sportive as his child (with whom he would play by the hour on the floor), and his wit flowed in a continuous stream—not that broad humour which is so much in vogue at the present day, but a genuine wit, classical I might say, and refined, that caused a smile rather than a laugh."

It appears that Shelley very much charmed all those English residents at Pisa who managed to get far enough across the gulf of their prejudices to meet him face to face. But he had no desire for anything that could be called society, and though according to many different witnesses his behaviour in a drawing-room was in the true sense aristocratic—natural,

kind and courteous—he much preferred the company of one or two intimate friends. The Shelleys' circle at Pisa was both literary and political—their devotion to the cause of Freedom in every country brought them the acquaintance of the Greek Prince and Patriot Mavrocordato, who was a great favourite with Mary, and to whom Shelley dedicated *Hellas*. During 1820 there had been attempts at revolution in Spain and Naples, which had filled Shelley with hope and enthusiasm, and called forth the *Ode to Naples* and the *Ode to Liberty*; while the disgust he felt at the royal squabbles of George and Caroline produced his best attempt at satire, *Swellfoot the Tyrant*. There had been some hope that Northern Italy would follow the example—which proved unfortunately so short-lived—of Naples, and Byron made a serious attempt to help the Revolutionary Carbonari, of which society he was a member. It all came to nothing, and when Byron left Ravenna to follow his mistress's family, the Gambas, into exile in Pisa, he was as weary of political enterprise as Shelley had been when he left Ireland. But there was enough genuine love of liberty in Byron—his one abiding virtue—to make him warmly second his friend when, on the news coming one day to Pisa that a man was to be burnt alive at Lucca for sacrilege, Shelley proposed that they should enter the town in a body and rescue him by force. The sentence was commuted to the galleys for life, and this desperate plan abandoned, so that fortunately the two poets were not involved in a serious battle. Shelley [illegible] very nice little shell for the Nautilus, your friend," he describes it to Clare—in which to navigate the swift stream of the Arno. The first time he was in it his friend Williams overturned the boat and spilled him into the water. The young man Reveley fortunately pulled his benefactor out. But he went on boating. In fact Reveley says, "Poor Shelley was in ecstasies of delight after his ducking. Williams and I didn't care for it." Trelawny tells a tale of his jumping into deep water, to see if that would teach him to swim, and lying "stretched out at the bottom like a conger-eel" till he was fetched up, whereupon he remarked that, as truth was at the bottom of a well, he might have found it if only Trelawny had left him there a minute longer.

The year 1821, and the six months of 1822 were probably the happiest of Shelley's life. Nature, poetry and friends combined to make it so. His first friendship of the year was

a disappointment—but it soon passed, and other and better affections took its place. His brief passion for the Lady Emilia Viviani, imprisoned, till her marriage with an unknown suitor, in a Pisan convent, was probably the only incident that really disturbed Mary Shelley's peace. The various other ladies who have been accredited to him as objects of his love, were, and remained, Mary's friends as well as Shelley's: Emilia very soon became a regret to Shelley, and an offence to Mary. She was very young, very beautiful, very effusive and poetical, very unfortunate in being cooped up in a convent when she was pining for sensations, and in being destined for an old and unknown husband—though such marriages were so much the custom that Emilia seems to have minded that less than her imprisonment. If Medwin can be trusted, she proved more unfortunate after her liberation: separated from her husband, and died, while still quite young, of a fever. There would be nothing to find fault with in this romantic young creature, if her letters had not survived. But from the fragments published by Professor Dowden, it is quite plain that Emilia was simply playing a cunning game. There is a sting, intended for Mary, in the rapturous peroration of almost every one of her effusive letters; and the attempt is obvious to insinuate herself between the husband and wife, and enjoy the diversion of a little irregular love affair. She also enriched herself by gifts and money at their expense. Shelley was misled, and for a few weeks admired her enormously—wrote the *Epipsychidion*, repented of its subject, and within ten weeks of first meeting Emilia sent it to his publisher with the remark "it is a production of a portion of me already dead." [1] He said afterwards that it was "a mystery," and at that, in so far as its history is concerned, we may leave it. Mary suffered for a while, and quite properly never annotated this alone of all her husband's longer poems. But she must have been far more than reassured—unlike Shelley's biographers, who are for the most part as easily deceived as King Lear about the accents of true love—by such tokens of affection as the letters which she received when her husband went to Ravenna during the following summer and wrote to her, day after day, sometimes twice daily, in the midst of much exertion and anxiety.

"My dearest Love," he writes, on August 4, his birthday, "I accept your kind present of your picture, and wish you would get it prettily framed for me. I will wear, for your

[1] He continued, however, with his usual generosity to make efforts to help her.

sake, upon my heart this image which is ever present to my mind.

"I have only two minutes to write, the post is just setting off. I shall leave this place on Thursday or Friday morning. You would forgive me for my longer stay, if you knew the fighting I have had to make it so short. I need not say where my own feelings impel me."

And in a later letter, after having told her of the scandals that were being circulated against him, he says—"My greatest content would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, would build a boat, and shut upon my retreat the flood-gates of the world. I would read no reviews, and talk with no authors. If I dared trust my imagination, it would tell me that there are one or two chosen companions besides yourself whom I should desire. But to this I would not listen—where two or three are gathered together, the devil is among them. And good, far more than evil impulses, love, far more than hatred, has been to me, except as you have been its object, the source of all sorts of mischief."

✓Even if she wished he had not included the one or two other chosen companions—which is improbable, for Mary had her own favourites, and craved society—she cannot for a moment have doubted that the writer loved her faithfully and deeply. It is sad that almost at the end of their days together there came a passing cloud between them, and Shelley, who could not be happy a week in a cold climate, or without the sunshine of sympathy, turned for consolation to Jane Williams, whom he really knew and acknowledged to be rather selfish and rather stupid. But she was bright and genial and friendly, and she was his companion while Mary was suffering from an inexplicable mood of despondency and coldness. His poems to Jane are among the most spontaneous and charming things that he wrote.✓

Edward Williams, Medwin's old friend, had come with his wife and family to live under the same roof with the Shelleys at Pisa shortly before Medwin left. They became the Shelleys' closest friends, and were with them almost continuously till Shelley and Williams perished together. After that Mary and Jane shared their home and their sorrow for many months. Williams was not clever, or in any sense original—but after Leigh Hunt he was probably the poet's worthiest friend. Shelley did not ask more of his friends than simplicity and affection, and rarely enough he found them. Among all

those who were honoured with his love and admiration, some deceived him, and some exploited him, and few had the courage to be altogether true to a man who was in conflict with the whole world. Medwin says of Williams: "A more noble, unworldly being never existed." Mary speaks of him as her husband's "favourite companion," and as one whose "love for adventure and manly exercises accorded with Shelley's taste"; and again as "the companion of Shelley's ocean-wanderings, and the sharer of his fate, than whom no man ever existed more gentle, generous, and fearless."[1]

Shelley was undoubtedly given to forming sudden Platonic attachments, but he was no philanderer—rather a true philanthropist. He had an inexhaustible fund of friendship, of faithful affection, genuine admiration, kindness, and sympathy and compassion for men and women and children—all who crossed his path. Writing to Hunt in the winter of 1819, he reproaches him gently for being so long silent: "I know well that if I were in great misery, poverty, etc. . . . you would think of nothing else but how to amuse and relieve me. You omit me if I am prosperous. You are like Jesus, who said he only came to heal the sick, when they reproached him for feasting with *publicans* and sinners. I could laugh, if I found a joke, in order to put you in good humour with me after my scolding; in good humour enough to write to us. . . . Affectionate love to and from all. This ought not only to be the *vale* of a letter, but a superscription over the gate of life."

There is no more striking example of his capacity for caring about what happened to other people than his great interest in Clare's and Byron's child Allegra, and his grief when she died, early in 1822. His repeated negotiations with Byron about her were undertaken mainly on Clare's account, but he loved the child herself, though she had left his care before she was two years old. In a letter to Mary he describes her at great length. He had been to visit her in the convent where she had been placed by Byron, in the face of her unhappy mother's pleadings, and where, from improper food and unwholesome air, she soon died, at the age of four. "I went the other day," Shelley writes, "to see Allegra in her convent, and stayed with her about three hours. . . . Her light and airy figure and her graceful motions were a striking contrast

[1] After his death, Mary wrote of Williams to Peacock as "my best friend, my dear Edward, whom next to Shelley I loved." The love of the two Shelleys for the two Williamses may illustrate a passage in a letter of Shelley's where he says of himself and Mary that it was not their custom to divide their pleasures.

to the other children there. She seemed a thing of a finer and a higher order. At first she was very shy, but after a little caressing, and especially after I had given her a gold chain which I had bought at Ravenna for her, she grew more familiar, and led me all over the garden, and all over the convent, running and skipping so fast that I could hardly keep up with her. She showed me her little bed, and the chair where she sat at dinner, and the carozzina in which she and her favourite companions drew each other along a walk in the garden. I had brought her a basket of sweetmeats, and before eating [illegible] of the nuns a [illegible] . . ." There [illegible] her health, and her escapades, and her interests.[1]

Allegra's death was the one sad event of Shelley's last spring; the preceding spring he had been much distressed by the death of Keats. And why, again, should he have been so deeply moved by that? Keats had held him conspicuously at arm's-length. It was not till the publication of *Hyperion* that Shelley had recognized his genius, yet he had written warmly to him about *Endymion*, and had sketched a letter to the *Quarterly* in its defence. When he heard of the state of Keats's health, he invited him out to Italy, an invitation to which Keats replied very vaguely, in a letter that has been too hastily judged; it is merely rather distant and sad—as it well might be, for he felt that he was dying.[2] After his death, and when *Adonais* was already written, Shelley heard the details of his last unhappy days. "I have received," he writes, "the heart-rending account of the closing scene of the great genius whom envy and ingratitude scourged out of the world.[3] I do not think that if I had seen it before I could have composed my poem."[4] Later he wrote to Severn, inquiring about Keats's papers, in case he might be of any assistance in collecting

[illegible]

Keats says, "If I do not take advantage of your invitation, it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much to heart to prophecy." The style is oracular—pathetically so—but there is nothing ungracious. A man confronting death may be excused the minor politenesses

[3] *Revision*—see Colvin's *Keats*, p 516, for the origin of this theory of Keats's death.

[4] Should the next sentence read, "The enthusiasm of the imagination would have *been* overpowered by the sentiment"?

and publishing them. Though there was thus no intimacy between Keats and Shelley—and what friendship there was, was all on Shelley's side—yet *Adonais* is a great poem of friendship, even if Keats is but the figure-head of it, as Emilia was of the *Epipsychidion*.

January, 1822, added one more to Shelley's circle—one in other ways as unworthy of him as any, who yet loved him more than all. Trelawny watched him for those last six months, and then fired off upon his course of adventure and brawl and ephemeral loves, and the memory of Shelley burned for ever warmly in his hard heart. Till at last, in the feeble accents of old age, in the strong emotion of faithful love, he wrote: "In my love for Shelley, and so rarely speaking to anyone that knew him, everything else vanishes from my mind." It is to a mind and heart so constant in this one respect that we owe our last accounts of the poet.

Happy at length among friends, happy as ever in the solitudes of nature—still doubtful of his powers and still employing them to ever more glorious effect—so Shelley lived his few last months. "The mountains sweep to the plain like waves that meet in a chasm; the olive-woods are as green as a sea, and are waving in the wind; the shadows of the clouds are spotting the bosom of the hills; a heron comes sailing over me, a butterfly flits near; at intervals the pines give forth sweet and prolonged response to the wind; the myrtle bushes are in bud, and the soil beneath me is carpeted with odoriferous flowers."[1] So nature smiled upon him in the summer of 1821 among the woods of San Giuliano. The autumn and winter were passed at Pisa, where *Hellas* was written, and several of the best lyrics. It was at Pisa, in the spring of 1821, that he had written his great prose hymn to poetry, thereby proving how completely and whole-heartedly he had given himself to his "mistress Urania." But only in 1819—his most creative year—he had said in a letter to Peacock: "I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science, and if I were well, certainly I would aspire to the latter." Peacock might therefore have been rather surprised when in reply to his satirical attack Shelley swooped down with his vehement and glowing *Defence of Poetry*. But if Peacock had studied his friend's poetical work, he would not have been surprised at all, for no poet has more passionately sung of poetry. "Shelley," says Trelawny, "never laid aside his wand and magic mantle." His enthusiasm had for ever

[1] Fragment from Shelley's notebooks, quoted by Dowden, vol. ii, p. 405.

"waxed stronger." "Poetry," he writes in his *Defence*, "defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. . . . It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos."

In this world of his own Shelley dwelt more and more. His way of life, as Trelawny describes it, was to be "up at six or seven, reading Plato, Sophocles, or Spinoza, with the accompaniment of a hunch of dry bread; then he joined Williams in a sail on the Arno, book in hand, and from thence he went to the pine-forest, or some out-of-the-way place. When the birds went to roost he returned home, and talked and read until midnight." The pine-forests near Pisa were his study, and Trelawny tells how he found him there one day, by a dark pool of water, beside a fallen pine: "Under its lea, and nearly hidden, sat the poet, gazing on the dark mirror beneath, so lost in his bardish reverie that he did not hear my approach. There the trees were stunted and bent, and their crowns were shorn like friars by the sea-breezes, excepting a cluster of three, under which Shelley's traps were lying: these overtopped the rest. To avoid startling the poet out of his dream, I squatted under the lofty trees, and opened his books. One was a volume of his favourite Greek dramatist, Æschylus, the same that I found in his pocket after death,[1] and the other was a volume of Shakespeare. I then hailed him, and, turning his head, he answered faintly: 'Hallo! Come in!' 'Is this your study?' I asked. 'Yes,' he answered, 'and these trees are my books—they tell no lies.' He told me he always wrote best in the open air. . . . There was, he said, an undivided spiri[illegible]
amongst the [illegible]
with himself [illegible]
Shelleys and Williamses moved to the lovely and solitary little village of San Terenzo, in the Gulf of Spezzia, his study was upon the water. His joy when at last he and Williams saw swimming into their ken the little graceful 30-foot vessel which was to be their joint property, would seem almost childish, if we did not remember how he had been haunted with the love of boats from his earliest years. All through his poetry we meet them—boats of rainbow and boats of pearl, and magic boats that scud over moonlit seas; boats that spin safely out of the reach of whirlpools, and plunge down starry cataracts, to rest at last between halcyon sky and water, as "between two heavens." He had all his life loved to sail paper boats in puddles, and in his poetic *Epistle to Maria*

[1] But that was really a *Sophocles*.

Gisborne he confesses to launching a cog-wheel in a bowl of mercury in Henry Reveley's workshop. Whenever he had been near water, he had found means of navigating it; whenever he could travel by water instead of land, he did so. Metaphors drawn from rivers and seas; similes of ships, only too often driven to wreck, occur again and again in his verse and in his prose.

The *Ariel* was the climax, as it was the culmination, of all his ocean dreams. "We drive along this delightful bay in the evening wind," he writes, "under the summer moon until earth appears another world." Trelawny, who was in charge of Byron's yacht, the *Bolivar*, and was stationed at Leghorn, called in at San Terenzo soon after Shelley's boat had arrived, and found them in ecstasy, and "Williams as touchy about her as if she had been his wife. They were hardly ever out of her, and talked of the Mediterranean as a lake too confined and tranquil to exhibit her sea-going excellence. . . . I went out for a sail . . . to see how they could manage her. . . . As usual, Shelley had a book in hand, saying he could read and steer at the same time, as one was mental, the other mechanical. 'Luff!' said Williams. Shelley put the helm the wrong way."

And the *Ariel* was not enough for Shelley; he built with Williams a frail little coracle in which he paddled round the shallow waters and into the caves by moonlight. He felt independent in it, he told Trelawny, and "safe from land bores." He frequently spilled out of it—apparently with relish—and according to Jane Williams, who ventured out with him and her two babies into deep water, was so fascinated by the spell of the ocean that he suddenly looked up at her after a profound and melancholy reverie with the remark: "Now let us together solve the great mystery." To poor Mary the *Ariel* brought but little pleasure, for she was anxious and depressed. "My only moments of peace," she wrote after the *Ariel* had borne her husband to his grave, "were on board that unhappy boat, when, lying down with my head on his knee, I shut my eyes and felt the wind and our swift motion alone." All the beauty of nature that surrounded the Casa Magni served to increase her horror of its inhuman solitudes.

San Terenzo is little changed to-day from what it was when Shelley lived there. His house, though now separated from the sea by a road, is right upon the beach, and can be clearly seen from some distance out to sea. "I wish you need not pass Lerici," he wrote when Hunt was about to set sail from

England for Leghorn—"cast your eye on the white house, and think of us." The peace of the two little villages of Lerici and San Terenzo, whose grey old castles gaze at one another across a deep blue inlet of the bay, seems as great now as it can ever have done—perhaps greater. They are reached now by a small steamer which plunges, whistling, out of the dingy port of Spezzia with its black skeletons of cranes and warehouses lining the sooty wharves, glides into a deeper, calmer sea, turns suddenly round a headland, and bears the traveller into a bay that seems as solitary and asleep as a tropical lagoon. And indeed, except by water, these villages are almost cut off from Spezzia by mountain and precipice. The mountains rise from the very shore, and are clothed in olives, which glimmer up the steep slopes until their silver is crowned by great peaks of ivory shining in the purple sky. These are the summits of the Carrara mountains, which gleam almost as if they were moonlit in the broad day. Shelley's house within is still as Trelawny described it—the stone hall, the winding staircase, the rooms opening upon a balcony, so close to the sea that it seems, as Mary said, like being on board ship.[1]

"I still inhabit this divine bay," Shelley wrote to Horace Smith a week before he perished, "reading Spanish dramas, and sailing and listening to the most enchanting music. We have some friends on a visit to us, and my only regret is that the summer must ever pass, or that Mary has not the same predilection for this place which I have, which would induce me never to shift my quarters."

The music was Jane's, who played and sang to the guitar when they sat out at night upon their balcony beside the summer sea.

"The stars will awaken,
Though the moon sleep a full hour later,
To-night;
No leaf will be shaken
Whilst the dews of your melody scatter
Delight.

"Though the sound overpowers,
Sing again, with your dear voice revealing
A tone
Of some world far from ours,
Where music and moonlight and feeling
Are one."

[1] It was once a Jesuit convent; and it came to be the last home of a poet who called himself an atheist. But Time brings in his revenges—the house of the poet who wrote *Before a Crucifix*, is now a Convent of the Sacred Heart, and Swinburne's great Sea-mother laps beneath stone walls behind which a Mother Superior tells her beads

Upon this scene, so full of happiness and beauty, so brief, the curtain falls. A short voyage in the *Ariel* to greet Hunt and give him the help of that ever-ready friendship and sympathy—a short voyage home—a thunderstorm bursting with concentrated violence out of a sky long set in heat and calm—and all was over. Whether an Italian felucca really ran the *Ariel* down to rob its owners, who were carrying money, or whether, as is more probable, the vehemence of the storm was too much for the frail boat and its inexperienced crew, when the mist which had descended with the storm upon the sea had cleared away, Trelawny, straining his eyes through his telescope at Leghorn, saw every boat but Shelley's. Had Trelawny been allowed, as he wished, to accompany them home in the *Bolivar*, they would have been saved. But some trivial muddle about his papers held him up, and they sailed away alone. Shelley went down with a Sophocles in one pocket and a volume of Keats in the other, where they were found when, many days after, his battered body was cast upon the lonely shores of Via Reggio. His last months had been the happiest of his life; he was stronger, and calmer in spirit, and was nursing some great poetical scheme. In those tragic words of Heracles:

κἀδόκουν πράξειν καλῶς,
τὸ δ'ἦν ἄρ' οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν θανεῖν ἐμέ.[1]

It is true that he seems to have been curiously conscious of some great change approaching. He looked forward intensely to seeing Leigh Hunt; yet from Pisa, where he had been happily wandering in Hunt's company, he wrote to Jane Williams in a very melancholy vein. "How soon those hours passed, and how slowly they return, to pass so soon again, perhaps for ever, in which we have lived together, so intimately, so happily!" It was a strange way to write, when he expected to be back home again in four days. In a letter to Gisborne of a few weeks earlier he says, with reference to his poetical ambitions: "I stand, as it were, upon a precipice, which I have ascended with great, and cannot descend without greater peril, and I am content if the heaven above me is calm for the passing moment." It recalls:

"O world! O life! O time!
On whose last steps I climb
Trembling at that where I had stood before:
When will return the glory of your prime?
No more—O never more!"

[1] Sophocles: *Trachiniæ*, II, 1171–2. "And I thought all was to go well with me—and it meant nothing but that I must die."

And the heavens *were* calm but for a passing moment.

We are none of us indifferent to Shelley. Even those whom he irritates, as he irritated Arnold and Kingsley, are greatly exercised about the problem that he presents. So good and so erring, so inspired and so wrong-headed, so full of hope and so despairing, so happy and so miserable—if we come within reach of any knowledge of his life, it will not let us go.

And why? Perhaps because he is in so many ways profoundly typical of modern man, and enacted the drama of our very souls; though we are as yet only in the uncertain conflict of the third act. And it concerns us very nearly to see what were his errors and his struggles.

The times in which Shelley was born formed the first period of the Modern Age: they were the beginning of that crowded chaos out of which we are still endeavouring to build a new world. Scientific thought was moving, religious thought was perishing; social institutions were breaking up; our hurrying, ambitious, unhappy, hard-working modern life was being developed. Shelley was at heart a genuine scientist in the best sense—he had that understanding, through his imagination, of the rhythm and uniformity of natural processes, the coherent vitality of the universe, which is at the root of all great scientific discovery. But he had first to learn, as we are learning, that any merely scientific conception of life, however wonderful and *progressive* it may seem, gives us but little help in living; that it can clothe and feed philosophy, but leaves the Son of Man without anywhere to lay his head.

He had at first decided that Truth could only be found by repressing faith, by substituting analysis for imagination, and becoming an "undivided votary of Reason." He carried this doctrine of Reason, as we have seen, to quite absurd lengths, and by applying it blindly to social and personal problems, was landed in domestic and public failure. He retraced his steps, he "got understanding," he became a creator and a prophet—but he remained in many respects, for better and worse, a "modern" still. His way of growing up, by action and reaction, so that his later life contradicted his early youth in so many respects, was typically modern. Apart from his poetry, he found but little satisfaction in the world. He was deeply discontented with the state of our so-called civilization—a condition of society but half-way between light-hearted barbarism and a genuine civilization, without the benefits of either. He was conscious that modern life and institutions do not express the development of the human spirit and under-

standing—that we are living among cruelties and crudities that we have in reality outgrown. And he became hypersensitive to the world's suffering and folly—hypersensitive in that he was liable to be overpowered by the thought of the prevalence of evil, to bend under its weight even if he never yielded, as so many modern writers, first of France and Russia, and now of all the rest of Europe, have yielded. He felt himself weak,

> " A nerve o'er which do creep
> The else unfelt oppressions of this Earth."

He did actually suffer, in body and mind, from what we now call " nerves," an ailment which is always really the result of mental conflict.[1] " So sensitive was he of external impressions," Medwin says, " so magnetic, that I have seen him, after threading the carnival crowd in the Lung' Arno Corsos, throw himself half fainting into a chair overpowered by the atmosphere of evil passions, as he used to say, in that sensual and unintellectual crowd."

But Shelley did not attempt to cast out Satan by Beelzebub. He was baffled by the problem of evil, as perhaps the very greatest men, Sophocles or Christ or Shakespeare, have not been; he could not transform it in his poetry, but he was learning to transcend it. At the same time, his sympathy with men remained unalterably strong and deep. He never became hardened to human suffering; he could never have endured, as the modern reader and play-goer endures daily, to have the miseries of man perpetually dissected in public by the blunt pocket-knife of literary quacks; he could not bear the ordinary society play, although, as Peacock says (and that only in 1861 !), " such disgusting outrages on taste and feeling as the burlesque by which the stage is now disgraced had not then been perpetrated." Even the cheerful sordidness of polite early Georgian literature, all innocent of Zolaism, revolted him: " Is not the vulgarity of these wretched imitations of Lord Byron carried to a pitch of the sublime? His indecencies, too, both against sexual nature and against human nature in general, sit very awkwardly upon him. But is not this monstrous? In Lord Byron all this has an analogy with the general system of his character, and the wit and poetry which surround, hide with their light the darkness of the thing itself. They contradict it even; they prove that

[1] He may even have been occasionally mentally unbalanced, though Peacock would prefer us to believe that he was capable of deliberately fabricating strange events.

the strength and beauty of human nature can survive and conquer all that appears most inconsistent with it. But for a writer to be at once filthy and dull is a crime against gods, men, and columns." [1]

He recognized that idealism in art and religion was the only possible cure for the materialistic tendencies of the age; that satire [2] was practically useless; that only in depicting fine character could literature make men "see the beauty of true virtue"—that life could only be ennobled by educating the desires of mankind, so that they should hope and strive for the best. And he came back out of his early digressions into Metaphysics and Materialism, to a faith which really embodied the simplest central doctrines of C[illegible] love thy fellow as thyself. H[illegible] his life. In that gross age he [illegible] not from principle, but because his pleasures were upon a higher plane. He was boundlessly generous, and, Byron says, "the *least* selfish of men"; he forgave wrongs unto seventy times seven. But his attempt to rule conduct from the heart had some results which have been bitterly criticized. He is ridiculed because, when he had run away with Mary, he wrote an affectionate letter to Harriet begging her to remember that he was always her faithful friend and had her interests at heart. He is suspected of disloyalty to Mary whenever he writes with [illegible] less, headst[illegible] sometimes *a*[illegible] He made t[illegible] that the Right can afford to wait. Whatever his imagination told *him* was the ideal of [illegible] at once to grasp. Time, [illegible] Shelley weep. Time wa[illegible] appointed and tormented him as it does all modern men.

But his mistakes were perhaps more often due to the practice of his youth—a typically modern practice, of analysing and rationalizing his motives. The result was that he sometimes determined his conduct by an abstract theory, instead of consulting a moral instinct, which, in his case, was particularly fitted to advise him; for it was naturally highly sensitive, and had been trained by much sad experience and deep reflexion. He had trained it, too, by his wide studies of imaginative literature—studies nowadays so much neglected. In a letter to Leigh Hunt, written in the winter of 1819, Shelley writes:

[1] "Columns," i.e. booksellers.

[2] See, for example, the *Satire on Satire*.

"I have confidence in my moral sense alone," and adds, "but that is a kind of originality"—and indeed it was. "My son, get understanding, and study the Classics." This was Scott's advice, and Shelley, as we have seen, took it at last, and took it fervently. Writing to Gisborne of the glories of the Greeks, he tries to picture what might have happened had the Greeks never been conquered by the Romans, and the Romans by the barbarians. "What, then, should we have been? As it is, all of us who are worth anything spend our manhood in unlearning the follies or expiating the mistakes of our youth. We are stuffed full of prejudices, and our natural passions are so managed, that if we restrain them we grow intolerant and precise, because we restrain them not according to reason, but according to error; and if we do not restrain them, we do all sorts of mischief to ourselves and others. Our imagination and understanding are alike subjected to rules the most absurd." Byron told Trelawny that it was Greece that made him a poet. It was the study of Greek as much as anything that made Shelley a man. And yet here again he was a modern and not a classic—again for worse and for better. Two out of the three great maxims of Greek wisdom he never learned—nothing too much—know thyself. But the third he utterly disregarded, for he had at the same time less faith in God than the Greeks, and more. He forgot so completely that he was a mortal, that he lived, in some respects, the inspired life of an Immortal, and thereby stole a march upon the Greeks themselves. He found in nature all the beauty that ever any Greek found, and in his own heart such love and hope as no Greek ever knew.

For Shelley, with all these fevers of the spirit—his discontent, impatience, and variableness; his rash impulses, sensitiveness, and melancholy—was a strong man. It is a fact frequently overlooked. He has been so tricked up in the frills and furbelows of sentimental scribblers, so bedarlinged with epithets of "Eternal child," of dabbler in rainbows, of "nursling of the womb, like a bee or a butterfly," [1] that many people think of him as a writer of enchanting lyrics, who was, in other respects, at best, one of God's own fools. "A poet," Shelley writes in the *Defence of Poetry*, "as he is the author to others

[1] This remarkable phrase occurs in Professor Santayana's essay on Shelley in *Winds of Doctrine*. Perhaps the professor had been misled by Shakespeare into supposing that where the bee sucks there also might that other mammal the butterfly, to the tune of the roaring of a sucking dove and other such phenomena that lie a-nursing in the womb of time.

of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue, and glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men. As to his glory, let time be challenged to declare whether the fame of any other institutor of human life be comparable to that of a poet. That he is the wisest, the happiest, and the best, *inasmuch as he is a poet*,[1] is equally incontrovertible." Seriously to study Shelley's life and letters is to realize how wise he was in his maturity, and how full of that tender-heartedness and courage which together make up goodness. As for his happiness—though he was a singer of so many sorrows—he lived, as he said, "for certain intoxicating moments, which are the 'ounces of sweet that outweigh a pound of sour.'"

He does not include in his catalogue of the poet's virtues the power of will, yet it was through the power of his will that he triumphed; the will to love, the will to hope, the will to create. His will was never wearied. "I always go on till I am stopped," he said to Trelawny, "and I never am stopped." "The softness of his expression and mild bearing were deceptive," Trelawny writes, "as you soon found out that he was a resolute, self-sustaining man." His "will was . . . inflexible. . . ." Among men so worldly and head-strong as Hogg, Byron, and Trelawny, he was the undoubted leader, and he was honoured as much as he was loved. The whole system of Byron's opinions would change under the spell of his earnest faith. Trelawny and Hogg were swayed by the memory of him long after he was in his grave. "He alone, in this age of humbug," said Byron once to Trelawny, "dares to stem the current, as he did to-day the flooded Arno in his skiff." Physically, too, he was no mere graceful will-o'-the-wisp, as his portraits have led people to imagine; he was tall, strong-limbed, says Trelawny, and like a young Indian. "All his motions were energetic and rapid; he never sauntered or lounged. He was very well on a horse,[2] but better on foot. He was a famous walker. In going up rugged paths or steep hills he was at the top whilst we strong men were not half-way up." "He was thoroughly masculine in act, prompt in reply, and bold in his opinions. The light from his very soul streamed from his eyes, and every mental emotion to which the human mind is susceptible was expressed

[1] Italics not in the text.

[2] But he was not an enthusiastic rider, and much preferred boating as he tells Clare in a letter, for he has "enough to do in taming his own will, without the additional burden of regulating that of a horse and still worse of a groom" (April 29, 1821).

in his pliant and ever-changing features. He left the conviction on the minds of his audience that, however great he was as a poet, he was greater as an orator." He was in fact a teacher and a leader of his fellow-men, and in his heart he knew it. He aimed at immortality. And so great was the power of love, and the fire of hope within him, that from the wreckage of a despairing age, from the sufferings and disillusions of his own rash early life, out of the trembling sensibility of his own nature, he built an indestructible faith in man.

And we,—

> "Vague half-believers of our casual creeds,
> Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd,
> Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
> Whose weak resolves never have been fulfilled;
> For whom each year we see
> Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;
> Who hesitate and falter life away,
> And lose to-morrow the ground won to-day—"

We gaze after him in wonderment. And many, like the author of these lines himself, will not believe in Shelley by virtue of their very kinship with him. Arnold is typical too, in his way, of the modern mind—full of ideals and aspirations, so many of which are poured forth like water into the sterile sands of an intellectual philosophy which is really a disguised despair[1]—Arnold, who suffered as Shelley did from the deep dejection of hopes unrealized, and yet could never firmly build as Shelley could upon the imagination out of which alone these hopes have birth. And so it comes about that Arnold, and such as he, search for all Shelley's mistakes and doubt all his motives, unable or unwilling to believe that so great an idealist, so pure a visionary, could have been also a practical man, and could in the end, by noble living and deep thinking, have won the right to say to us—" Arise, and will!"[2]

[1] Thus the modern spirit, nobly-sprung, and highly-destined, finds at this present innumerable sands, as did the River Oxus—

> "To hem his watery march, and dam his streams
> And split his currents; that for many a league
> The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strained along.
> Oxus forgetting the bright speed he had
> In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,
> A foil'd circuitous wanderer——"

Sohrab and Rustum.

[2] See *Revolt of Islam*, canto viii. st. 16.

CHAPTER VI

ALASTOR

> "I strove to seize the inmost form
> With ardour fierce and hands of flame,
> But burst the crystal cabinet,
> And like a weeping babe became."
>
> *Blake: The Crystal Cabinet.*

THE lyrics of the latter half of 1814 and beginning of the following year proved Shelley a poet · *Alastor* showed what manner of poet he was to be. The crossed and blotted record of his early life had given no indication to what uses he would put his genius. If to poetry, it was impossible to guess to which of the many contemporary forms of poetry he would turn. Like Wordsworth he had glowed with the passion for liberty and moral ideals, would he, like Wordsworth, preach so long as to lose little by little both the fire of action and the fire of fancy, and [illegible] steadfast light of imagination be befogged by the exhalations of a mystical metaphysic? Having discovered poetry so late, and in some measure as a reaction against both politics and philosophy, would he more probably be content, with Keats, to find truth by seeking beauty? In *Alastor* we have all these veins—and all with a difference The philanthropist and moralist speak in the preface, but this in common with most of Shelley's prefaces, has passages which must be taken, like Quince's prologue, not in the sense, but in the spirit. The lover of pure beauty leads us by devious paths to scenes of sublimity and wonder; before the publication of *Kubla Khan* he conducts us through measureless caverns by subterranean floods. The Philosopher presides over all, but the unsubstantiality, the mysticism, the abstractness of the poem are not from him. The Prince of philosophers deemed it bliss enough for the perfect man, forswearing all human love, all personal and individual life, to proceed "from the love of one

in his pliant and ever-changing features. He left the conviction on the minds of his audience that, however great he was as a poet, he was greater as an orator." He was in fact a teacher and a leader of his fellow-men, and in his heart he knew it. He aimed at immortality. And so great was the power of love, and the fire of hope within him, that from the wreckage of a despairing age, from the sufferings and disillusions of his own rash early life, out of the trembling sensibility of his own nature, he built an indestructible faith in man.

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form to that of two, and from that of two, to that of all forms which are beautiful; and from beautiful forms to beautiful habits and institutions, and from institutions to beautiful doctrines; until from the meditation of many doctrines, they arrive at that which is nothing else than the doctrine of the supreme beauty itself, in the knowledge and contemplation of which at length they repose."[1] "What," asks Plato, "must be the life of the man thus contemplating this universal beauty?" Shelley in his preface to *Alastor* replies, in effect, that: "So long as it is possible for his desires to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured, he is joyous, and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. . . . He images to himself the Being whom he loves." Love, we are made to feel in the poem, whether of God or man, cannot remain satisfied with contemplation—it must have communion.

Alastor might indeed be a refutation of the whole conception of love which Socrates in the *Symposium* gives as the supreme ideal. But in 1815, Shelley was still most imperfectly acquainted with Plato, and had probably not read the *Symposium* at all. The dilemma of the poet in *Alastor* Shelley had found in his own soul. The poem tells us what is this dilemma: the preface, for the most part, tells us what it is not.

Shelley's prefaces to *Alastor* and the *Revolt of Islam* show him still, in prose, a moralist and politician, still a "votary of Reason," demanding some practical result from his truancy into the fields of poetry. In the interesting little homily which introduces us to the unearthly scenes and strange passion of *Alastor*, he tells us that the poem "may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind. . . ." It is a picture "not barren of instruction to actual men"; it represents, he would have us believe, a young man who has attempted to live in the world of ideas, without human sympathy, and is punished "by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin." Even in the poem itself, the hero's ecstatic dream is thus described:

"The spirit of sweet human love has sent
A vision to the sleep of him who spurned
Her choicest gifts."

But except for these two lines the poem makes no other attempt to conceal its true theme. In the preface the youth is condemned: in the poem he is glorified. Shelley's critics make the usual mistake of thinking there is more truth in prose than in poetry, and hence largely their failure to understand and

[1] From Shelley's translation of the *Symposium*.

enjoy the inspired fairy tale of *Islam*; they believe every word of his prefaces—much of his poetry they have never yet believed. "Shelley in *Alastor*," writes Dowden, "would rebuke the seeker for beauty and seeker for truth, however high-minded, who attempts to exist without human sympathy, and he would rebuke the ever-unsatisfied idealist in his own heart. . . ." These statements, however true of the preface to *Alastor*, as applied to the real Shelley and his poetry, are certainly false. "In its inmost sense the poem is a pleading on behalf of human love." It would be as true to hold that the essence of *The Ancient Mariner* is in its concluding stanzas; that its deep purpose was to make the reader, like the wedding-guest, a sadder and a wiser man, resolved never again to stone his neighbour's cat.

It would be strange, indeed, that a poem intent upon glorifying human love should commence with an invocation and Hymn of Devotion to everything but man. "Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood." . . . It is Shelley himself, not the hero of the poem, who first speaks. With earth and ocean he claims brotherhood, and kinship with "bright bird, insect, and gentle beast." His inspiration is to be all from Nature, among whose many voices "the deep heart of man" is but just mentioned, along with the air, the forests and the waves. It is Nature he loves: Nature whose secrets he has striven vainly to uncover:

"Mother of this unfathomable world
Favour my solemn song, for I have loved
Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched
Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
And my heart ever gazes on the depth
Of thy deep mysteries. . . .
. . . and, though ne'er yet
Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,
Enough from incommunicable dream,
And twilight phantasms, and deep noon-day thought,
Has shone within me, that serenely now . . .
I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
May modulate with murmurs of the air,
And motions of the forests and the sea. ."

And then he begins his story:

"There was a Poet whose untimely tomb
No human hands with pious reverence reared,
But the charmed eddies of autumnal winds
Built o'er his mouldering bones a pyramid
Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness, . . .
Gentle, and brave, and generous. . . .
He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude."

If the extraordinary history of this young man—his ecstatic visions, immense travels, and solitary death were intended as a pleading for human love against those young men likely to follow in his steps, we should naturally expect Shelley to have represented his end as, though sad, yet merited: the poem would have paused to show us what possibilities of human love he had thrown away: we should have been made to wish that one of the many love-sick maidens who tended him upon his travels might have reclaimed him from his unbodied visions into the human circle. But nothing of the sort can we feel. He does not repel us as he would surely do if he appeared as some kind of unsatisfied love-lorn mystic, inhumanly fastidious, seeking from Cashmir to Caucasus for his perfect affinity, and dying at last because he has not found her. "Men do not die of these disillusionments," says Mr. Clutton-Brock. No, certainly they do not. And the death of the poet in *Alastor* seems inevitable; the one possible conclusion to the mystery. For the poem is not, as the same critic holds, "only concerned with the youth who seeks for the ideal in the form of a perfect woman"; it is not in the least concerned with him, and as little with the theme of Keats's *Belle Dame sans Merci.*[1] It has far more in common with Galahad's quest of the Sangreal: a quest that ended, surely enough, in early death.

Alastor is usually considered to have a "vein of unhealthy sentiment"[2]—as being in fact a morbid poem. Certainly if Shelley's hero had been represented as at length persuading himself to make the most of faulty human nature, and settling down to a family life, morbid it would have been and ridiculous. For in that case we should have been asked to think of him as a real person, an actual man, and he is only a mood of the soul—a mood that came upon Shelley frequently, and always from the same source, the beauty of nature. And this mood is only free from morbidity so long as it is kept aloof from practical life, in a dream world of its own. In the passage where Shelley describes the spirit who appears to the poet in a vision and embraces him, there is something hectic, almost offensive: for the description is much too earthly and realistic: she who should have been but a symbol of the soul's desire steps out of the land of imagery like some scantily dressed beauty of a society ball. It was a mistake Shelley sometimes made: and whereas a conception so imaginative as that of Asia called forth his finest poetry, a mistake of this

[1] See Clutton-Brock: *Shelley, the Man and the Poet*, chap. vi.
[2] See Symonds' *Shelley*, chap. iv.

kind lured him into the worst sort of doggerel. Here we have unhealthy sentiment without a doubt, and its very seriousness [illegible] than that kind of flippant [illegible] l "frantic gesture," "the irresistible joy" and the "dissolving arms," might almost have justified the view that "an instinct altogether animal helped to form Shelley's visions."[1] But fortunately this incongruous passage is soon over, and more wonderfully and mysteriously than ever the dream sweeps on, to fade away at length in the moonlight on the mountain side.

Almost the whole of *Alastor* is occupied with descriptions of wild and marvellous scenery—mostly amongst mountains and rivers. It seems generally supposed that these descriptions were introduced merely because Shelley had recently been to Switzerland and voyaged down the Rhine. It is sometimes even said that all this natural beauty has no real connexion with the hero's fate. But in reality it is the basis of the whole poem. *Alastor* was not the outcome of any [illegible] life with Mary;[2] neither was it [illegible] had saved him from an endless [illegible] te the contrary: his reawakened sense of beauty had intensified within him that yearning for love and beauty which is the crown of thorns of all men of [illegible] to [illegible] 'er [illegible] ıst [illegible] — to leave it but as the shadow of a shadow:

> "I loved—oh, no, I mean not one of ye,
> Or any earthly one, though ye are dear
> As human heart to human heart may be;—
> I loved, I know not what—but this low sphere
> And all that it contains, contains not thee,
> Thou, whom, seen nowhere, I feel everywhere
> From Heaven and Earth, and all that in them are,
> Veiled art thou, like a . . . star."

Keats, who was more like Shelley than any other poet in his feeling for Nature, can have had no difficulty in understanding that last most magic scene in *Alastor*, where the visionary dies upon the mountain side gazing at the sinking moon. He can have found nothing irrelevant in the glorious

[1] Clutton-Brock.
[2] See Koszul's *Jeunesse de Shelley*.
[3] See Dowden on *Alastor*.

panorama that has led up to this climax; nor have been tempted to remark that men do not die of such disillusionments.

> "Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
> While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
> In such an ecstasy."

And for Keats, also, this communion with beauty which could for a moment so charm the spirit with the idea of death, is instantly followed by the pang of reflection:

> "Still would'st thou sing, and I have ears in vain,
> To thy high requiem become a sod."

And so with the youth in *Alastor*. After the description of his long pursuit of the unattainable ideal—a pursuit which for Shelley had always more of pain than of joy—his death, though represented as strangely peaceful and full almost of exultation, is followed by a bitter lament.

When Shelley wrote this poem he had been given to understand that he might not have long to live. All his life he had thought deeply about death: for him it had been, as he afterwards described it, "that contemplation of inexhaustible melancholy, whose shadow eclipses the brightness of the world." Many of the poems of this time express almost a dread of death; dread lest what he so infinitely desired, might be everlastingly denied him: lest when death came indeed it would leave but

> "A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings
> The breath of heaven did wander—a bright stream
> Once fed with many-voiced waves—a dream
> Of youth, which night and time have quenched for ever,
> Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered now."

Those "Presences of Nature" which had so tremendous an effect even upon the serene spirit of Wordsworth, that they seemed to make

> "The surface of the universal earth,
> With triumph and delight, with hope and fear
> Work like a sea"

were for Keats and Shelley a still more disturbing power. In Shelley they produced a three-cornered contest between his most passionate feelings. His deep joy in Earth's beauty led him only too soon to spend himself in restless longing for the ideal that Earth could never yield, this brought him back again to face the terrible uncertainty as to what death might

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[illegible] of the poem enacts these experiences of his soul. At first, in joy and exultation he explores vast tracts of the earth, gather- [illegible] to him her secrets. He sees Athens, Jerusalem, Babylon, Arabia, Persia. An Arab maiden, enamoured of this strange wanderer, waits upon him unseen with food and drink; but he leaves her, and travels on, content, like Plato's philosopher, with "the wide ocean of intellectual beauty."

It is in the wondrous land of Cashmir that the spirit appears to him in a vision and he realizes the need for love. That is to say, he ceases to be content with merely gazing upon the beauty and mystery of the universe: he thirsts for communion with them. Obsessed by this unappeasable yearning he voyages on over the world's wildernesses, that can no longer bring him peace:

"thus driven
By the bright shadow of that lovely dream,
Beneath the cold glare of the desolate night,
Through tangled swamps and deep precipitous dells,
Startling with careless step the moonlight snake,
He fled. . . ."

Upon the lone Chorasmian shore he embarks in a little shattered boat, determined to die among the waves. But the boat defies both storms and reefs, and after being drawn down a subterranean river under the roots of the Caucasian mountains, is by a miraculous chance thrown out of the very eddies of a terrific whirlpool into a safe backwater[1] beyond the reach of the current:

". . . the boat paused shuddering—Shall it sink
Down the abyss? Shall the reverting stress
Of that resistless gulf embosom *it?*
Now shall it fall?—A wandering stream of wind,
Breathed from the west, has caught the expanded sail,
And, lo, with gentle motion, between banks
Of mossy slope, and on a placid stream,
Beneath a woven grove it sails, and, hark!
The ghastly torrent mingles its far roar
With the breeze murmuring in the musical woods"

[1] The extremely puzzling geography of these streams in *Alastor* will be simplified by remembering that the poet leaves his boat near the whirlpool, and meets a second stream *in the forest*—this he follows, not uphill as one naturally imagines, but *downhill* to the edge of a precipice—the whirlpool has cast him literally mountain-high.

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hide. "Silent death, faithless perhaps as sleep, with doubtful smile mocking its own strange charms."

Such then is the material of *Alastor*; unearthly, and unsubstantial; but intensely real, at least to Shelley. And the hero of the poem enacts these experiences of his soul. At first, in joy and exultation he explores vast tracts of the earth, gather-

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From the banks:

> "the yellow flowers
> For ever gaze on their own drooping eyes,
> Reflected in the crystal calm. The wave
> Of the boat's motion marred their pensive task,
> Which nought but vagrant bird, or wanton wind,
> Or falling spear-grass, or their own decay
> Had e'er disturbed before."

This sudden transition from horror and danger to peace and beauty was a kind of dream motif that Shelley loved to use. A similar change—also represented by the calm of cool and shining water—occurs twice in the *Revolt of Islam*. Once, when Laon finds himself suddenly transferred from the madness and torture of his sun-scorched prison to the hermit's mossy tower beside a lake: and again at the end, when from death at the stake he awakes to a new life upon the waved and golden sand beside an Elysian pool.

In this quiet grove the poet disembarks, and wanders forth into a great forest, a primæval paradise where he seems again to find peace in the contemplation of Nature. But soon his yearning for the spirit which underlies its forms drives him on, and he wanders away out of the wooded valley to the bare lands on the edge of a precipice. Here, where he alone of men has ever penetrated, he finds a sheltered nook, scooped from a rock. Beneath it the whole world seems spread—the stars, the setting moon—

> "Islanded seas, blue mountains, mighty streams,
> Dim tracts and vast, robed in the lustrous gloom
> Of leaden-coloured even, and fiery hills
> Mingling their flames with twilight, on the verge
> Of the remote horizon."

Arrived at this solitary watch-tower, the poet feels that death is upon him. He lies down among the rocks, and gazes out into the void. A yellow mist, that "drank wan moonlight even to fullness," rises up, and blots out the stars. The moon sinks slowly and with it the poet's life: while even a glimmer of its shining margin is seen he lingers:

> "But when heaven remained
> Utterly black, the murky shades involved
> An image, silent, cold and motionless,
> As their own voiceless earth and vacant air."

And then Shelley breaks forth into a passionate lamentation and bitter protest against the doom of mortality:

"O, for Medea's wondrous alchemy,
. . . O, that God,
Profuse of poisons, would concede the chalice
Which but one living man has drained, who now,
. . . wanders for ever,
Lone as incarnate death. O, that the dream
Of dark magician in his visioned cave,
Raking the cinders of a crucible
For life and power, even when his feeble hand
Shakes in its last decay, were the true law
Of this so lovely world."

The poem concludes with the often-quoted lines, beginning: "It is a woe too 'deep for tears.'"

Alastor and other poems were first published in 1816, and speedily sank into obscurity. One reviewer described them as quite incomprehensible, and suggested that this was due to the influence of Wordsworth. The great mass of the reading public was still at the time quite out of sympathy with the genuine Romantic movement. Even the simple religious Nature worship of Wordsworth was considered by them occult and an affectation. Yet Wordsworth could convey the whole atmosphere of his imaginary scenes in vivid detail. Shelley's landscapes have none of this completeness: nor the brilliant colours that make those of Keats strike instantly upon the eye of the imagination. His strange scenes are like things beheld in a dream: we hardly know whether it is with the eye or the ear or the touch that we apprehend them.

The descriptions in *Alastor* were, therefore, not likely to help the poem to success. The quality of its verse, on the other hand, must have impressed any cultivated reader; but the theme proved too much of an obstacle. Miss Mitford relates how she first became acquainted with the poem. The subject seemed to be so vague and impossible that she felt quite astray in the succession of the melodious lines, and whenever she had to put down the book, was completely at a loss where to begin again. Leigh Hunt alone seems to have recognized in the little volume promise of something valuable, and referred to Shelley in the *Examiner*, as a "striking and original thinker." The expression, though it probably pleased Shelley greatly, is rather curious, for *Alastor* is almost as devoid of *thought* as even a poem can safely be. Perhaps Hunt had half-consciously detected how large a part the metaphysician played in Shelley's mind and work. Perhaps also he was vaguely aware that Shelley's poetry was in its nature something very new indeed.

Alastor might seem, indeed, a strange poem to be produced

by a man who had struggled for years to be a practical reformer and leader. Yet it shows only too clearly why he had failed. He was impatient of all the ephemeral interests of life, and minor defects of character: and he had no use for any form of compromise. The hero of *Alastor* can see no alternative between triumph and death, no half-way house in which to rest awhile content, on the road towards the Ideal. The whole poem, though full of a kind of cosmic tenderness for man and animals and plants, shows nothing that might be called sympathy for the ordinary human troubles. It is pre-occupied with moods of the soul—moods which not one man in a thousand is aware of harbouring. Most people do not find death a contemplation of inexhaustible melancholy—they do not like to contemplate it at all: and the beauty of the world causes them no unalleviable longings for the beauty which is eternal and divine. Shelley never quite realized this: never believed that most people are so furiously busy getting through life that they hardly ever stop to listen to the soul's eternal plaint. Such experiences and strivings of the soul, it is obvious from *Alastor*, were to be his main concern in poetry. He was not going to find his inspiration in the accepted materials—in the emotions on the surface of human life; in the ordinary moral values; or in the purely æsthetic sensations. He was to find " Enough from incommunicable dream, and twilight phantasms, and deep noon-day thought." Our question is: " Did he find enough?"—and can *we* find enough, not in his brief and perfect lyrics only, but in the main body of his poetry and teaching, to make it of general and abiding value?

Shelley embarked with *Alastor* upon his solitary poetical career: still stirred by the same enthusiasm of humanity which had informed his political efforts: writing now, as he had acted then, with a passionate self-oblivious sincerity, but in a language largely unintelligible to the mass of his contemporaries.

CHAPTER VII

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

> "The million rose to learn, and one to teach
> What none yet ever knew, or can be known."
>
> *The Boat on The Serchio.*

I

I have taken the resolution to see what kind of a tragedy a person without dramatic talent could write." This resolution was at first too much for him—only a tiny fragment of the *Tasso* was written. He considered the Book of Job for the same purpose, but, as far as we know, never wrote a line. And then the year 1819 saw a wonderful achievement. Shelley wrote two plays;[1] one the work of a person with almost every talent in the world except dramatic talent—the other a complete and in some ways striking drama, containing all the finest materials, living characters finely contrasted, imaginative language, stirring situations, terror and pity; but written after all by a person who had not dramatic talent—who was simply not inspired to pure drama.

Of the latter, *The Cenci*, Shelley himself said: "I don't think much of it. It gave me less trouble than anything I have written of the same length." While of *Prometheus* he wrote, "It has cost me severe labour. . . . It is the most perfect of my productions." He described it also as "original." "It has no resemblance to the Greek drama." But where his idea for it originated he does not tell us. He attributes its

[1] *Prometheus Unbound* was begun in the autumn of 1818, but the greater part was written the following year.

yet more than half a play, and must have had one other parent besides "this divine climate." Shelley had recently been absorbed in reading Greek plays; and we can hardly doubt that that other parent was the *Prometheus Vinctus* of Æschylus.

How must Shelley, the indefatigable enemy of all "Tyranny" in states, or creeds, or parents, have thrilled at the fateful words of the opening chorus of Æschylus's Play: *ὁ δ' ἐπικότως ἀεὶ θέμενος ἄγναμπτον νόον δάμναται οὐρανίαν γένναν, οὐδὲ λήξει, πρὶν ἂν ἢ κορέσῃ κέαρ, ἢ παλάμᾳ τινὶ τὰν δυσάλωτον ἕλῃ τις ἀρχάν.*[1] Here was a starting point for Shelley. Here does Æschylus darkly hint that the overbearing rule of Zeus may yet be ended —he may tire of domination *or* his sceptre may be torn from him. These words, like much else in Æschylus's play, hardly prepare us for the reconciliation of the *Prometheus Solutus.* Shelley must have longed to redeem the shadowy promise, to create a *δυσμαχώτατον τέρας*, a huge portent of a Demogorgon to hurl Zeus into the abyss. This fall Shelley's Prometheus foretells, as does his prototype. But where the Prometheus of Æschylus wavers perpetually between two ideas, and two desires—the idea of just retribution and the idea of expedient compromise, the desire to see Zeus punished, and the desire by whatever means to gain his own freedom—Shelley's Titan has one only inflexible purpose—Zeus is Evil: Zeus must go. In this, and I think in most cases where we can trace, or imagine, a source of direct inspiration for Shelley in the Greek play, the influence is partly provocative.[2] Hence the justice of his statement that his drama does not resemble the Greek.

Everywhere Æschylus must have tantalized and disappointed his perfectibilian longings. The character of Prometheus as drawn by Æschylus is a challenge, to some extent, to every thoughtful reader. We are forced sometimes to wonder whether a courage tempered to last for centuries could have risked so many movements of impatience and petulance. Shelley obviously thought not, and ruled out of his picture a good many little jarring touches—and all the grim humour.[3]

[1] *Prometheus Vinctus*, ll. 162 foll., "But he in wrath ever keeping his mind unbent holds in subjection the brood of Ouranos, nor will he desist, until either he have sated his heart, or by some act of craft another seize—if seized it may be—his Empire from him."

[2] An obvious exception is Shelley's Mercury, a blend of the Oceanus and Hephaistos in the *Prometheus Vinctus,* and of course numerous parallels in the language of certain passages.

[3] Shelley's impatience of the little weaknesses which make the hero of Æschylus so human, is curiously shown by one or two passages where he closely follows the Greek in expression but not in spirit. The Greek Prometheus is told by Hephaistos that he will welcome both

[illegible]

of such a satiric tongue, or displayed such a ready-witted ill-temper as the caustic hero of Æschylus. Naturally not: for not ten times that period could have inspired Shelley with the inimitable remark of Prometheus to Oceanus, wavering finally away from desire to help his relative towards caution for his own skin—στέλλου, κομίζου, σῶζε τὸν παρόντα νοῦν (Hurry up and go while you've still got your present resolution safe). Yet in spite of the vast difference between them, it is clear that the older Prometheus was father to the younger in this sense: the idea in the Greek play of the Titan, suffering on account of his services to humanity, and defying an omnipotent tyrant on the strength of a mysterious prophecy, was the material which set Shelley to work.

One other thing in the Greek Play probably exerted a [illegible]'s imagination—once [illegible]—'Ω δῖος αἰθὴρ καὶ [illegible]ων τε κυμάτων ἀνήριθμον γελασμα παμμητορ τε γῆ.[1] Great poetry is often the direct incitement to great poetry in another kind, but Shelley could hardly attempt a speech for his Prometheus that should seem to challenge comparison with this one; yet there was one respect in which he could improve upon Æschylus. The air and the winds, the rivers and the waves, Mother Earth and the all-seeing S[illegible] him? [illegible] that be [illegible] student [illegible] about the Ocean nymphs whom Æschylus introduces as it were in response to Prometheus's impassioned appeal to the elements. In come hurrying these Ocean misses, having overcome with difficulty their doubts about the propriety of

day and night—day as a relief to the icy reign of darkness, and night as a refuge from the scorching heat of the sun. (*P.V*, lines 23-25.) Shelley's Prometheus says:

"And yet to me welcome is day and night"

not as a relief from suffering, but because each day brings nearer the hour of Jupiter's fall. Compare, for a similar slight change, intended to emphasize the resolution of his Prometheus, Shelley's play, Act I, lines 646 and following, and *P.V.*, 213.

[1] "O Sky divine, O Winds of pinions swift,
O fountain-heads of Rivers, and O thou
Illimitable laughter of the Sea!
O Earth, the Mighty Mother . . ."

See Morshead's translation

their proceedings, but fortified with a hard-won paternal consent; and henceforward this most heroic of plays continues to the accompaniment of their naïve and archaic-schoolgirl comments. Their final determination to follow Prometheus into the abyss is not at all less astonishing than it is magnificent. Shelley's imagination which instinctively personified all forms of natural beauty, must have been filled with visions by the opening speech of Prometheus; visions which Æschylus does not encourage. Shelley employed them for the creation of the greater number of his *Dramatis Personæ*. Asia, Panthea, Ione—immortal nymphs, yet expressing the gentle feminine sympathy and courageous devotion suggested after his own manner by Æschylus: the Earth, the Sun and Moon, the swift-winged spirits of Time and Thought, Echoes and Whirlwinds, Ocean and Apollo—all these form Shelley's conception of the relation between the suffering Titan and consoling Nature. But as in the Greek play they can do no more than comfort; Prometheus must free himself.

Æschylus in his lost play, whether from choice, or perplexity, or the need to conform to a religion which still held Zeus enthroned, freed Prometheus by letting him submit to Zeus. But how he could have made acceptable the reconciliation of his splendid victim and his perverse and clumsy tyrant, we can hardly imagine. Actually he would appear to have set himself the sort of impossible problem that quibblers amuse us with when they ask what is to happen when an irresistible force impinges upon an immovable body. For he makes Prometheus divinely resolute, and Zeus, however apparently contemptible, omnipotent. To solve it in compromise is not to solve it at all. With any such patched-up peace Shelley was of course indignant. *His* Prometheus triumphs by the orthodox method of annihilating his opponent. But is the result much better? When Shelley's Prometheus is unbound all his glory departs from him: he exchanges the heroic torments of his Caucasian rock for the languors of a flowery cave, peopled with nymphs and dreams. In the last act he is out of sight and out of mind, while the elemental energy that had been his passes to the spirits of the Earth and Moon, to the Genii and the Hours.

For Shelley also had set himself an impossible problem. But his problem was as different from that of Æschylus as his faith and his philosophy were different.

Æschylus is not prepared to assert that (for man at least) the purely good, the wholly right, can exist at all. His Trinity is the Trinity that the Greek accepted, because he saw it

manifest—Good, and Bad, and Strong. To a race but just emerged from the terrors of barbarism, and threatened by them still, Power must naturally seem the first object of man's worship. The Zeus of Æschylus *reigns*; therefore though he may need to learn[1] both virtue and his own destiny from Prometheus, Prometheus must bow to him. "Greek morality insisted on the duty of submission to the inevitable as such."[2] In fact, for Æschylus, Zeus is *Power*, and must therefore be partly good. But Shelley always tends to associate [illegible]

Zeus is strong, because he reigns, and the world beneath his sway is full of woe, he is, and must be *bad*. Though Shelley's hero exclaims before the poem is sixty lines old that misery has made him wise, it is plain that his creator saw in this no possible justification for the mysterious ways of God. Æschylus on the other hand is so satisfied with his doctrine of πάθει μάθος (learning by suffering) that he is content to let Zeus gain teaching not so much from his own sufferings as vicariously through those of his victim. It is enough for Æschylus if by any means a *rapprochement* can be brought about between the Powerful and the Benignant.[5] But Shelley can be satisfied [illegible]

[1] In his *Greek Tragedy* Mr. Sheppard, among others, attributes to [illegible]

[illegible] *rometheus* [illegible] dness for what is weak. "Resist not the weakness, such strength is in meekness," etc. . . . say the spirits who bear Asia to the realms of Demo- [illegible]

"Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whate'er it touches. . . ."

Here perhaps is some slight trace of an effeminacy which Kingsley thought he could discover in the whole attitude of Shelley's mind, when he dared to weigh that sublime impatience of soul in his insensitive hand and declare it wanting

[5] See for example the Æschylean Fragment, No. 381 (Oxford Text, ed. Sidgwick):

ὅπου γὰρ ἰσχὺς συζυγοῦσι καὶ δίκη,
ποία ξυνωρὶς τῶνδε καρτερωτέρα.

drama the gradual process by which evil is transformed. His Jupiter is suddenly wiped out. While Æschylus moves slowly towards a reconciliation, Shelley rushes headlong towards a complete rupture, followed by the ecstasies of unalloyed triumph. For Æschylus is resigned in his noble Greek Pessimism: Shelley is rebellious in his Christianity.

In the two years that passed between the composition of *Islam*, and the equally rapid summer-birth of *Prometheus*, Shelley had learnt something of the lesson of Faith—which is after all very nearly the same as the lesson of Despair. He had heard the Muezzin who cries from the Tower of Darkness: "Fools! Your Reward is neither Here nor There!" But he never fully accepted either the optimism or the pessimism involved in a renunciation of all but the spiritual Kingdom. He could not curb his nature to forego its dream of outward and tangible Heaven-on-Earth. At best he could only bring himself to postpone it a few thousand years. The fourth act of his *Prometheus* was written because he could not remain satisfied with the "But Man . . ." of Act III, Sc. 4. After a few months he was impelled to rush on to the end of his tether—towards the ideal, the superhuman, the unrealizable—and so give us a wonderful rhapsody, and so spoil his dramatic poem. But his whole conception and treatment of the Prometheus myth involved him in this impossible problem. As Jupiter is made to represent all the evil forces, on his fall the reign of perfection must arise. But it was all very well to attempt to paint a Paradise at the end of a dream-poem like *Islam*, or a love-poem like *Epipsychidion*. A drama must end to some extent in the same key in which it began. What an offence against the inner logic of the three unities is a play which begins with Prometheus and the Furies in Time and Caucasus, and ends with the Sun and Moon in Elysium and Eternity! When Shelley unbinds his Prometheus, his drama falls all to bits, and his stage becomes a chaos. The real actors are crowded out of it, while portions of the scenery, the full orchestra and the flashing lights make glorious havoc of the whole. Till at length Demogorgon restores order—and dramatic harmony—with his sublime peroration, and the curtain falls.

The myth as treated by Æschylus is thus dramatically far more successful. But then Æschylus is really not playing the game, and Shelley is. By innumerable touches Æschylus humanizes all his characters and reduces both Zeus and Prometheus to a scale in which they can be comfortably handled and dramatically foiled. The petulant but proud endurance of

Prometheus is [illegible] of Zeus. When we see [illegible] ompromise by which Prom[illegible] humbled, is a satisfacto[illegible] audience could enjoy the mere living story based on the immortal myth, without ever puzzling over its underlying philosophy. Not so, apparently, Shelley's readers. Where Æschylus has painted human portraits, Shelley has remembered that his canvas is the Heavens, and he has drawn great dim luminous figures in the clouds, with the result that many of his critics have tried the most elaborate allegorical, philosophical and moonstruck interpretations, seemingly oblivious of the fact that even here "the play's the thing."

Shelley's *Prometheus* can be read and appreciated with nothing besides an ordinary moral instinct, and the rather abnormal [illegible] It is not [illegible] system: [illegible] verse written since Shakespeare; [illegible] inal. It contains [illegible] haracter drawing, and some [illegible] Yet appreciation of these fin[illegible] ed in the clamour as to whether Asia means Love or the cause of Love,[1] or "the incarnation of the emotional series of divine ideas,"[2] and similar questions.[3] But Shelley was at all times and by nature a bad allegorist. Though he often seems almost to lose himself in his so ætherial worlds, what he seeks there is the *concrete*. If he describes Paradises which are unreal, it is not for lack of the desire to make them actual. The shadowy figures of the *Prometheus Unbound*, whatever they may have been intended to represent at the start, become, as soon as the poem takes life (and that is with its first few lines), beings existing for themselves, and as real as such ætherial creatures can be made in a setting so unearthly. Nor are they mere ineffectual angels. Prometheus is a *strong* character—one of the most convincing strong characters Shelley has created. Like the other persons of the drama, he is in outline only, for he is effective only in

[1] See Locock's ed. of the poems. Notes on *P U*.

[2] Todhunter's *A Study of Shelley*. Shelley makes Prometheus address Asia in Act III, Sc. 3, as "light of life, shadow of beauty unbeheld," with which definition we must be satisfied.

[3] [illegible]

the first act. But in that act his impressiveness does not at all depend upon his being supposed to represent the human soul Not even Jupiter is a mere cypher signifying Prejudice, or institutional Religion, or any such thing; still less does he embody the conception of a personal Devil. Dramatically he is the tyrannical opponent of the brave and suffering Titan, as Zeus is in the play of Æschylus. Philosophically he is, no doubt, something more.

For though Shelley was not a good allegorist; he was a deeply philosophical poet—quite a different thing. There *is* a philosophy at the back of the *Prometheus Unbound*—the philosophy which, after years of experience and thought, he had gradually evolved. Yet some writers who discuss Jupiter and Prometheus, with reference to his conception of evil, so far from giving too subtle allegorical meanings to the poem, accuse him of the crudest possible beliefs. Jupiter represents, we are told, "the tyrannous and external Evil by which humanity is oppressed," for Shelley "conceived of Evil as imposed on man by a supernatural tyranny." "Jupiter's overthrow is causeless." "Something happens in the middle of the play; but Shelley cannot tell us what it is, because he does not know."[1] But Shelley is not in the least like a mere youthful versifier sitting down to write on a subject about which he has never thought before. By the year 1819 he had meditated, read, discussed, much more widely and deeply than most modern writers and theorists in a lifetime. There is no indication in any of his writings that he ever supposed evil to be a plague inflicted on man by an omnipotent Demon. Even in *Queen Mab*, where he certainly makes the profound mistake of advocating Reason as a cure for evil, he writes:

"The universe,
In Nature's silent eloquence, declares
That all fulfil the works of love and joy,
All but the outcast, Man. He fabricates
The sword that stabs his peace; he cherisheth
The snakes that gnaw his heart; he raiseth up
The tyrant, whose delight is in his woe."

And here, as in *Prometheus*, man is represented as slowly achieving his own liberation from his ignorance and misery.

Perhaps the numerous critics who have foisted upon Shelley this extraordinary view of "external evil" have been partly misled by supposing that Prometheus symbolizes Man—the

[1] See Mr. Clutton-Brock's *Shelley: the Man and the Poet*, chap. x. And for similar views Mr. Brailsford's *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*, p. 227. Also Dowden's *Life*—and other critics *passim*.

whole of Man. But since Shelley represents him in the play as Man's preserver and champion, he could hardly have been guilty of such a dramatic and philosophic confusion. "Humanity," said Dowden, criticizing *Prometheus*, "is no chained Titan of indomitable virtue. It is a weak and trembling thing." Shelley never said Humanity was a Titan at all. He insists always in his poems upon the weakness of man—his own weakness, most of all. But he did believe that there is a *divine* element in man which is indomitable, and will be the eventual saviour of the whole man. That element Shelley calls the *soul* of man. "Alone the soul of man," says Jupiter, "like unextinguished fire Yet burns towards heaven with fierce reproach, and doubt . . . Hurling up insurrection." In his speech from his throne Jupiter does not mention Prometheus by name at all. He only speaks of this rebellious, tortured, enduring human soul. And later, in the grasp of Demogorgon, he cries for the merciful judgment of his enemy—gentle and just and dreadless, the true monarch of the world.

The reader who does not instinctively apprehend the philosophical background of Shelley's poem, should analyse it for himself. He will find it simple, consistent and profound.

But he must not suppose that Shelley is going to give him a clear account of the origin of evil; nor reveal the secrets of the grave.[1] He only knows that there is at work in man's universe a force that resists the good—whether in man's character, or in nature. This power he treats in *Prometheus Unbound* now from the one point of view, now from the other: Jupiter's reign is associated with earthquakes and storms as well as with wars and tyrannies and individual crime.[2] And since the evil power is not creative, it lives at the expense of the good. "Prometheus Gave wisdom which is strength to Jupiter" . . . "gave all he has." And in another form

[1] In his preface to *Hellas* Shelley says of the chorus, "Worlds on worlds are rolling ever. . . ." "The concluding verses indicate a progressive state of more or less exalted existence, according to the degree of perfection which every distinct intelligence may have attained. Let it not be supposed that I mean to dogmatize upon a subject concerning which all men are equally ignorant, or that I think the Gordian knot of the origin of evil can be disentangled by that or any similar assertions."

[2] With all ". . these foul shapes, abhorred by God and Man,
Which, under many a name and many a form,
Strange, savage, ghastly, dark and execrable,
Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world."
Act III, lines 180–183.

Evil is that which tolerates the base, or by its resistance to the higher development, causes low and degenerate forms of being. When the Furies threaten Prometheus with torture he replies:

> "I weigh not what ye do, but what ye suffer
> Being evil. Cruel was the power which called
> You or aught else so wretched into light."

A devout Biologist may be able to rejoice in the existence of tape-worms and bird-eating spiders; to most minds, however conscious that these creatures are not evil in themselves, they seem to express an evil, being both done and suffered.

The greater part of human miseries and difficulties Shelley attributed, as do most people, to man's own folly and weakness; to his both committing and permitting evil—particularly perhaps to the latter. At the end of Act III of the *Prometheus*, when humankind are redeemed, the Spirit of the Hour speaks of man's past "guilt or pain, which were, for his will made or suffered them." And in Act IV the Earth Spirit contrasts Man, now "a sea reflecting love" with:

> "Man who was a many-sided mirror
> Which could distort to many a shape of error
> This true fair world of things. . . ."

And Shelley did not expect that all evil and suffering would be suddenly one day miraculously [illegible] Jupiter is not in the least causeless: far from it. He perishes on the arrival of Demogorgon—but not *because* of it—as we shall see. Demogorgon, say the critics, is no more than an algebraic x. Shelley has told us and them that he is Eternity With Time and Evil coexist Eternity and Love. While Jupiter reigns Demogorgon keeps his shadowy watch The Fairy says in *Queen Mab*:

> "Yes, crime and misery are in yonder Earth. . . .
> But the eternal world
> Contains at once the evil and the cure."

Love, Eternal Love, Demogorgon tells Asia, is the one power not subject to Time and Fate. Love made the living world: yet in man's universe it is Jupiter who reigns: and yet Jupiter is a slave—a slave unto himself. With the dawn of Eternal Love he passes into nothingness. Of such truths, as Asia says, each heart to itself must be the oracle. The paradox which Shelley expresses with so much sublety in the great scene between Asia and Demogorgon is the abiding spiritual paradox

which in some similar form, most creeds and philosophies are willing to accept.[1]

Shelley's supreme poetical effort is not his supreme poetical success. It suffers from excess of light: too many dawns and noons, too many flashing stars and shining dews; it suffers ... "Truth," said Landor, ... ll quantities calms men, ... a, and is attended by fatal consequences in its excess." Shelley may have killed the Prometheus myth perhaps with too much truth. But his philosophical poetical drama remains a work of audacious idealism and imaginative daring, an abiding glory to a nation that has ever prided itself on strange and far adventure. The poets of the future—perhaps of a distant future—will tread again those regions of poetry which Shelley was the first to enter.[2]

Jupiter, kept in power by fear in the hearts of men, has held three thousand years in torment his one-time friend and ally, Prometheus. The scene opens at daybreak, and Prometheus appears, as in the play of Æschylus, bound to the rocks of a wintry ravine. Ione and Panthea, daughters of Ocean, are seated at his feet. Shelley's Titan in his first great speech, a blend of defiance and lamentation, describes his own proud suffering, and the senseless triumph of the God who, but for him, had been "almighty." His only source of hope and ... upon his ... : he yields ... —but he quickly recalls it, and speaks even of Jupiter's doom with pity:

> "I speak in grief,
> Not exultation, for I hate no more
> As then ere misery made me wise."

And in this mood he thinks again of the curse he had breathed, ages ago, upon Jupiter, and determines to repeal it. He asks the Mountains and Whirlwinds to repeat it to him, but they only reply with shuddering recollections of its terrible nature.

[1] "All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil," writes Shelley. Christ said: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the son abideth ever."—*St. John* viii. 34 and 35.

[2] Shelley writes of his play in a letter to Peacock, April 6, 1819: "It is a drama, with characters and mechanism of a kind hitherto unattempted."

The repetition of the curse is often criticized as altogether pointless. But it can be justified both poetically and dramatically. Shelley is treating his Prometheus as (what he is not) a mellowed and ennobled development from the Æschylean Titan, that giant of resentment, impatience and contempt. Prometheus, we are to feel, has changed in three thousand years "so that aught evil wish is dead within." The spirit in which of old he had rejoiced in the ultimate prospect of Jupiter's ruin has departed, and he wishes to realize the extent of his evil thoughts, that he may fully and for ever forswear them. And it becomes plain when the curse is spoken, how far he has travelled since the beginning of his sufferings.

There is another reason for the repetition—not dramatic, but very amusing to the student of Shelley's character—Shelley *wanted* to curse Jupiter. Throughout his life he managed to live up to most of his doctrines of forgiveness and love, but in this matter of cursing tyrants he had perpetual backslidings. He knew quite well that Prometheus must no longer be allowed to curse, and yet felt that he, Shelley, must find a Balaam and relieve his feelings. His clever plan of the revocation solved the problem, and he got rid of his wrath by the method of denying it, a method in which he was rather well-practised.[1]

For the rest, Shelley's treatment of this episode is thoroughly effective. The elements to whom Prometheus appeals are afraid to speak the terrible words. Earth will not speak them for fear of retribution—only the dead will dare, and their language Prometheus cannot understand. Finally Earth bids Prometheus summon from the shades where dwell the empty phantoms of reality, his own or some other ghost, that cannot be made to suffer for its audacity—

"so the revenge
Of the Supreme may sweep through vacant shades
As rainy wind through the abandoned gate
Of a fallen palace."

Prometheus will not allow evil speech to pass the lips even of his ghost, and he calls up the phantasm of Jupiter. This is not a mere senseless device at all. The curse, expressing a spirit of wrath and vengeance, belongs to that evil side of life which Jupiter represents. And there is a fine irony in the method by which Jupiter is either cheated of his vengeance,

[1] See for instance, *Lines to a Reviewer* and *Lines to a Critic* and the references to critics in the Preface to the *Revolt of Islam*, and passages referring to the same gentlemen in the letters.

or forced to wreak it on his own ghost. When at length the curse is delivered from the very lips of the tyrant's shade, it is as splendid and defiant and terrible as we had been led to expect.

[illegible] end, Prome- [illegible] ing to suffer [illegible] Prometheus [illegible] love, and so [illegible]

[illegible] This Prometheus refuses to do—not, as in the play of Æschylus, because Zeus has not offered to set him free, but for the far more impressive reason that his secret is "the death-seal of mankind's captivity." Æschylus gives us no hint that Prometheus is concerned any longer with what may or may [illegible]

[illegible] pungent and spirited, more sublime, Mercury argues with Prometheus, begging him to consider the awful length to which his sufferings may reach.

Mercury: Yet pause, and plunge
Into Eternity, where recorded time,
Even all that we imagine, age on age,
Seems but a point, and the reluctant mind
Flags wearily in its unending flight,
Till it sink, dizzy, blind, lost, shelterless;
Perchance it has not numbered the slow years
Which thou must spend in torture, unreprieved?
Prometheus: Perchance no thought can count them, yet they pass.
Mercury: If thou might'st dwell among the Gods the while
Lapped in voluptuous joy?
Prometheus: I would not quit
This bleak ravine, these unrepentant pains

Prometheus bids him waste no more time in talk, but let the Furies get to their task. Away flies Mercury, and Ione cries to Panthea:

"Dear sister, close thy plumes over thine eyes
Lest thou behold and die: they come: they come
Blackening the birth of day, with countless wings."

Shelley's Furies are a horrible and wonderful tribe—imaginatively the direct descendants of the Furies of the Eumenides,[1] but completely evil, and more subtly and demoniacally cruel. They threaten to wither Prometheus with pain and render him distracted by their mockery.[2] To their torture he replies:

> "Pain is my element, as hate is thine"—

and to their further threats:

> "I weigh not what ye do, but what ye suffer,
> Being evil."

Thus thwarted, they summon their most hellish powers, in lines which somehow recall Marlowe by their insight into the torments of spiritual conflict:

> "Thou think'st we will live through thee, one by one,
> Like animal life, and though we can obscure not
> The soul which burns within, that we will dwell
> Beside it, like a vain loud multitude
> Vexing the self-content of wisest men:
> That we will be dread thought beneath thy brain,
> And foul desire round thine astonished heart,
> And blood within thy labyrinthine veins
> Crawling like agony?"
>
> *Prometheus:* Why, ye are thus now;
> Yet am I king over myself, and rule
> The torturing and conflicting throngs within,
> As Jove rules you when Hell grows mutinous.

Lines like these can never have received the admiration and the understanding that they deserve, or it would not have been possible for so many critics so often and so loudly to proclaim that Shelley was to the end a child, all unlearned in the ways of life and the struggles of the human soul.[3] It was not ignorance and childishness, but profound and compassionate insight that taught him to write the words "astonished heart." Here is Francis Thompson's "child of the rainbow," Matthew Arnold's "ineffectual angel," expressing perhaps more vividly than any poet ever did before the agony of man's struggle to save his soul, not from priests and kings, but from himself—poor hybrid of Heaven and Earth.

[1] His imagination had early been impressed by these. At the head of canto iv of the *Wandering Jew* (1810) he quotes *Eumenides*, lines 48–52.

[2] Cf. *Eumenides*, lines 328–333.

[3] For instance, "Shelley had no knowledge either of the nature of evil, or of the means by which evil can be abolished; therefore he could not represent either." Clutton-Brock: *Shelley, the Man and the Poet*, p. 183.

Again Prometheus is too strong for them, and now they call their sister Furies, armed with even worse devices, bidding them desist from their horrible tasks on earth to come to their aid:

> "Leave the self-contempt implanted
> In young spirits sense-enchanted,
> Misery's yet unkindled fuel:
> Leave Hell's secrets half unchanted,
> To the maniac dreamer; cruel
> More than ye can be with hate
> Is he with fear.
> Come, come, come!"

Thus reinforced, they make their last great attack upon their victim. All torture, physical and mental, directed against himself has failed. But now they set before him two visions of the miseries of mankind: of the havoc wrought by superstition and persecution, and the horrors of the French Revolution. And then at length, after a pause, Prometheus groans. Ione and Panthea, who have sat all this while with shrouded eyes, thinking the Furies are inflicting new tortures upon him, dare at last to look up. There is but one Fury left, [illegible] t, but at his own [illegible] Christ crucified. [illegible]

> "Behold an emblem: those who do endure
> Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap
> Thousandfold torments on themselves and him."

Prometheus must reflect upon the bloody course of religious persecution, and the casting out of the true Christian, and his courage for a moment fails him.

Then the Fury flings its last venom at him, speaking with the tone of reasoned despair:

> "The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
> The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.
> The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
> And all best things are thus confused to ill.
> . . . they know not what they do."[1]

[1] On this magnificent passage Shelley's most recent editor quotes [illegible] and adds, "Much of it certainly seems inappropriate, coming from the mouth of a Fury." There would seem to be nothing inappropriate from the mouths of critics.

And even still Prometheus is not vanquished.

> "Thy words are like a cloud of winged snakes;
> And yet I pity those they torture not."
> *Fury:* Thou pitiest them? I speak no more! (*vanishes*).

Throughout this act Prometheus is gaining in strength. Now the effect of all the torments and sights of horror inflicted upon him is to gird his soul, as he says,

> "With new endurance, till the hour arrives
> When they shall be no types of things which are."

Jupiter is preparing his own ruin, as surely as Prometheus his own release.

To soothe his suffering heart Earth now calls up spirits of imagination and prophecy who foretell his ultimate triumph. These spirits, independent creatures moving through the mind of man,

> "As the fish within the wave,"

belong to the same strange order as the dreams in *Adonais*; it was not merely winds and clouds that Shelley clothed with individual life. Even the thoughts and dreams of a man's mind seemed to him mysterious messengers from a realm beyond. It must be to such images that he refers in his Preface when he speaks of "imagery . . . drawn from the operations of the human mind," and points out that their use was familiar to the Greeks. Mary Shelley says he drew it particularly from Sophocles. He returns again and again to this idea, and in the present instance employs it with wonderful effect. The Furies, which represent, both in Æschylus and to a great extent in Shelley, wild, mad, and tormenting thoughts, are followed by thoughts of hope, high prophecies, and deep imaginings. The two spirits that speak first have each a message of hope drawn from despair, and the fourth delivers those wonderful lines, "On a poet's lips I slept," perhaps the finest and subtlest praise of poetry that ever poet made.

The fifth and sixth spirits would seem to come from a quite different part of Shelley's brain and soul—from the confusion of that old lumber-room of his, where were stored together the hollowed turnips and the human skulls and all the unpoetical phantasmagoria of his youth, which in moments of unimaginative excitement he was always apt to unpack. Here he resorts first to headless patriots gleaming in the night, and next to the extraordinary statement:

> "Ah, sister! Desolation is a delicate thing," etc.

We must console ourselves as best we can for this, noticing[1] that he is remembering—though perverting—a passage in Plato's *Symposium*, and pass on.

Stirred by their prophecies of his ultimate triumph, Prometheus demands of these spirits how they know the future. They reply that:

> "Wisdom, Justice, Love, and Peace,
> When they struggle to increase,"

are as sure a prophecy of the triumph of the good cause as the whitethorn is of spring. Throughout this act we have seen the struggle, and we are prepared for the fulfilment of the [illegible] admi[illegible] and [illegible] one t[illegible] to be [illegible] closes.

This first act is not only in itself perhaps the most wonderful part of the poem, but it contains practically the whole dramatic development of the play. From his first revocation of his vows of vengeance to his last appeal to Love, Prometheus has steadily gained in virtue and power. The overthrow of Z[illegible] elley t[illegible] upon ti[illegible] turn over the evil shades of vengeance, suffering, and despair, has turned the scale at length, and with the beautiful and ominous opening of Act II we begin to expect some wonderful change:

> "From all the blasts of heaven thou hast descended:
> Yes, like a spirit, like a thought, which makes
> Unwonted tears throng to the horny eyes,
> And beatings haunt the desolated heart,
> Which should have learnt repose: thou hast descended
> Cradled in tempests; thou dost wake, O Spring!
> O child of many winds!"

To take this scene as following immediately upon the last is to make Shelley guilty of innumerable inconsistencies.[2] It

[1] See Locock's notes in his edition.

[2] If Panthea had been dreaming all night, she could not have witnessed the arrival of the Furies in Act I. The Furies actually arrived at dawn—but, then, Panthea says that as soon as the Eastern star grew pale she flew off to Asia. Whereas, at the end of Act I, she has some conversation with Prometheus, after morning has broken, before she flies away. But the strongest argument that this morning of Act II is quite different from that of Act I is to be found in the *descriptions*

must be supposed to follow after a few days, during which winter has suddenly given place to spring, and Prometheus has become mysteriously irradiated by a presentiment of his release. Panthea, in a dream, has been inspired with rapturous foreboding, and caught up into the fire of the Titan's soul. Through Panthea Asia mysteriously enters into communion with the spirit of her lover, and shares in his premonitions of release. In this mood of expectancy both sisters are ready to pursue the mysterious echoes that bid them "follow" and lead them from the scene. There is no break except in the locality between this and the next two scenes. The nymphs enter a wood where two fauns converse, and where choruses of spirits make exquisite music. Still pursuing the echoes, they arrive at a pinnacle of rock above the chasm where dwells Demogorgon. Down this abyss they are borne by spirits which foretell to Asia that she shall loose the Doom of Jupiter.

An examination of these scenes leaves one wondering why Keats[1] advised Shelley to "load every rift of his subject with ore," for what Shelley seems to suffer from in general, though most of all in his *Prometheus Unbound*, is rather an inability to sift his gold and remove the dross from it. Here, in a play already suffering from a too brilliant setting, he frequently digresses into irrelevant passages of purple. This first scene of Act II contains lines as fine as anything Shelley could write, and shows him developing a blank-verse style unexpectedly pure and strong:

"With our sea-sister at his feet I slept"

is a line neither Miltonic nor Shakespearean, and, like the first few lines of the scene, as new as it is wonderful. Yet at a little distance the whole scene and much of the following two look like a display of fireworks on a wet evening. Images are piled up irrelevantly and to no effect, similes soar up from nowhere, ideas and epithets are used and re-used—and the Muse set scurrying after a hairy-visaged dream, simply because the words "Follow, follow, follow" affected some sentimental

of the two. Prometheus speaks of "this quiet morning" (Act I, line 813). Asia speaks of a windy morning (Act II, sc. i, lines 1–7 and 20). Moreover, one is a wintry morning, the other the first morning of spring. It is true that Prometheus and Asia and Panthea speak of a paling Eastern star, but this would merely imply that Panthea always left Prometheus for Asia at that stage of the daybreak.

[1] Keats's letter was written before he had seen *P.U.*, but after he had read the *Cenci* and the *Revolt of Islam*, and no doubt many of the lyrics.

mechanism in Shelley, as the words "With Care" got on the pathetic nerve of Calverley's old gentleman.[1]

Mene, Mene, was written upon the ceiling of Belshazzar's banqueting-hall by the hand of God. But who could have stamped "O Follow, Follow!" on the petals of an almond-tree, and on the sides of a mountain (even in a dream) except an American Advertising Agency? Yet Shelley spends thirty lines upon this phenomenon, and uses the word "follow" twenty times in the space of seventy lines, rhyming it three times with the word "hollow."[2]

The charming scene with the Fauns, though dramatically very irrelevant, is poetically a relief—except where we are compelled to hear about the nightingale that, "sick with sweet love, droops dying away, On its mate's music panting bosom."

The third scene has a fine descriptive passage, which is too spun out at a moment when expectation and wonder should be hurrying us along. The spirits sing well but rather too oracularly.

With the fourth scene Shelley is himself again; this, with the first act and the first scene of Act III, forms the body of the whole poem—the rest is mainly drapery and colour. There seems to be but one flaw in it: that Asia, though she conveys the effect, no doubt, of resolution and courage, is yet too much the reverse of tongue-tied in the presence of that strange and awful being, Demogorgon.

I do not know of anything in Literature—unless it were the Jewish God who appeared, in part, to Moses on the mountain—which can have suggested to Shelley this mysterious shadow of Eternity and Destiny. He is more awe-inspiringly colourless than any Greek divinity. Yet he is something more than a mere symbol. He shows sympathy with mankind; he is a moral force, though himself the servant of a spirit greater than he. In Act IV he is rather an all-pervading

[1] See Calverley's poem, *Thoughts at a Railway Station*:

"I am a stern cold man, and range
Apart: but those vague words, '*With Care*,'
Wake yearnings in me sweet as strange;
Drawn from my moral Moated Grange. . . ."

[2] And this is the sort of thing in Shelley, and indeed in the Romantics generally, which the next generation chose to imitate. As Mr. Clutton-Brock pointed out, Tennyson echoes this passage in *The Princess*:

"A wind arose and rush'd upon the South,
. . . and a voice
Went with it, 'Follow, follow, thou shalt win.'"

And what is slushy in Shelley can be even slushier in Ten

atmosphere than a presence, but an atmosphere into which all the other spirits are gathered up. When Asia and Panthea become aware of him in his subterranean abode, he is "shapeless; neither limb, Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is A living spirit." To man living in Time, Eternity is but a shadowy dream; and to the spirits freed from Time, as are the elemental forces, the genii, the dead, the blest, that people Shelley's fourth act, Eternity, though they inhabit it, is still a dream. By his dim figure of Demogorgon, Shelley seems to convey something of the philosophic paradox, that Eternity is rather an idea than a reality, a thing that will everlastingly fade like the foot of the rainbow, as fast as it is found.

This strange power Asia questions about the causes of good and evil, and the fate of Prometheus. A doubtless amusing but very curious comment upon this wonderful scene is that of Mr. Clutton-Brock: "When they find Demogorgon and question him about the nature of the universe, he of course can tell them no more than Shelley knows, so that very little comes of their visit."[1] To begin with, the release of Prometheus comes of their visit. For the rest, is it very little that any great poet should express in noble verse his deepest thought about the mysteries of life? It is little presumably, because Shelley died in 1822, and had therefore never heard of electrons or talked about the *élan vital*; because, in fact, he was a poet and not a metaphysician or a scientist. The real basis of all such criticisms is the assumption that science is truer than poetry; or rather, that poetry is merely an *embroidery* upon existing knowledge and can add nothing new.[2]

Asia asks Demogorgon, "Who made the living world?" He answers, "God." "God," he declares, the author of all that makes life noble, "thought, passion, reason, will, imagination." But when she asks him who is the author of fear and pain and crime, his answer is the brief "He reigns." And she is conscious that these things are not the fundamental evil, but its results. So when she has recited the great works of Prometheus among men, and all that he suffers in expiation, she returns to her theme, and asks, who causes man to be "the

[1] *Shelley: the Man and the Poet.* A very much more profound and attractive study of Shelley by the same writer forms the Introduction to Mr. Locock's edition of the poems.

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wreck of his own will"? Not Jove, she herself declares, for that he has no absolute power over the will of other beings seems plain from his manifest fear of Prometheus. Who, she asks, is Jupiter's master? Is Jupiter himself a slave?

Demogorgon replies in truly oracular manner:

> "All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil.
> Thou knowest if Jupiter be such or no."

An answer which makes it clear to Asia that evil is no essential principle of the universe—and indeed no principle at all. She understands that the real master of Jove is not an evil, but a good power, and so she asks:

> "Whom calledst thou God?"

> "I spoke but as ye speak" (he replies),
> "For Jove is the supreme of living things."

This answer also has been misunderstood—the usual fate of oracles. Asia means, who is the Being whom Demogorgon had described as God, the creator of the living world? To this Demogorgon makes no clear answer; he merely says, in using the word "God" I used language as ye on earth use it; I did not mean a personal God. Jove is the supreme of living things: in the world of time and strife the spirit of evil is in power—or rather, as the foregoing answers have made clear, he enjoys the shadow of power, so long as the soul of man conceives that there is none greater than he.

But Asia persists:

> "Who is the master of the slave?"
> *Demogorgon:* If the abysm
> Could vomit forth its secrets. . . . But a voice
> Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;
> For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
> On the revolving world? What to bid speak
> Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change? To these
> All things are subject but eternal Love.

atmosphere than a presence, but an atmosphere into which all the other spirits are gathered up. When Asia and Panthea become aware of him in his subterranean abode, he is "shapeless; neither limb, Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is A living spirit." To man living in Time, Eternity is but a shadowy dream; and to the spirits freed from Time, as are the elemental forces, the genii, the dead, the blest, that people Shelley's fourth act, Eternity, though they inhabit it, is still a dream. By his dim figure of Demogorgon, Shelley seems to convey something of the philosophic paradox, that Eternity is rather an idea than a reality, a thing that will everlastingly fade like the foot of the rainbow, as fast as it is found.

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scene. Here Shelley has artistic sanction for all the rapturous colour and music that he can command, and for seventy lines—nearly all glorious—he spares neither. The wonderful song addressed to Asia by one invisible, celebrating in her Shelley's true God—the spirit of Love, of Intellectual Beauty, of Life, of Nature—is accepted as one of the loveliest things he ever wrote. At the same time, no one claims to completely understand it. For Shelley is here telling us more than he knows.

Asia's answering hymn was an afterthought, and, like many of Shelley's afterthoughts, an unfortunate one. It has but one fine passage in it; the rest, after fluttering long on an impotent melody, comes helplessly to earth.

In the first scene of Act III we behold Jupiter at revel in the Elysian halls. He appears this once only, but he presents in very few lines something of the character of a spoilt and cruel despot, who is yet not incapable of vindictive courage. And Shelley depicts him in a spirit of mockery which almost amounts to humour.

"Rejoice! henceforth I am omnipotent,"

is a line that is quite Shakespearean in its subtle suggestiveness. Like the magnificent first line of the *Cenci*,

"That matter of the murder is hushed up,"

it shows how Shelley was perhaps not so much incapable of drama as unattracted to it. Jupiter informs his court that he had only one cloud on his horizon, the rebelliousness of the soul of man. He has no doubt that they will all be delighted to hear that he has even now begotten a strange wonder, which is destined to put a real end to man at last. He urges them all to drink to the Day. Next he introduces to them Thetis, whom he calls "bright image of eternity"—a name which, in view of the imminent arrival of the actual eternity, must have some special significance. Thetis, the chosen mother of the wonder, has found the whole proceeding a severe ordeal—as Jupiter takes some pride in informing the assembled Gods. Her he consoles by insisting that it is a very great wonder indeed—his son, yet made eternal and still mightier than his father, by being invested with the limbs of that strange, shapeless power, Demogorgon. Demogorgon he believes to have been dethroned as well as dismembered. Here comes the chariot, cries Jove, bringing my son's incarnation, "Victory! Victory!" Whereupon Demogorgon himself enters and bids Jupiter descend to everlasting darkness.

Jupiter had, after all, begotten nothing. What really Shelley means to be the relation between Jove and Demogorgon is not very clear. But he certainly seems to have been working out a conception of evil as uncreative and negative. Demogorgon says that he is Jove's child, as Jove was Saturn's, "mightier than thee." But we know from the very nature of Demogorgon that he must have co-existed, both with that vegetative period when Time fell like an envious shadow from the throne of Saturn,[1] and with that second period of Time, the period of strife and suffering, which is even now giving place to eternity. Moreover, in Act I, Earth mentions "Demogorgon, a tremendous gloom"; and in the third scene of Act II Asia speaks of the realm of Demogorgon as though he were a well-known power, however dim and mysterious. Perhaps Jove is only to this extent his father in that he has called him forth from a passive to an active state of being. In any case, the fatal wedding of Jove and Thetis, of Evil, the shadow, to the bright image of Eternity, has resulted in Jove's summoning Demogorgon to Heaven for his own destruction. For the evil principle is doomed when it attempts to manifest itself in Eternity. With the arrival of Eternity, and the full recognition of the power of Love, the rule of Jove is over. In vain the tyrant rages, and then implores. As he plunges into the abyss he consoles himself with the malignant hope that the [illegible] will share in his ruin. But as he disappears for [illegible] is rising, upon his fall, [illegible] differently, the word [illegible] whole malice of Jove has only served to bring forth infinite goodness.[2]

The next scene would have made a calm and beautiful ending to this poem of elemental storm. Ocean and Apollo converse together, in language wholly suited to their divinity, about the fall of Jove, and the future of universal peace and love which will follow for God and man and nature. Reference is made to the joy of Asia, now about to be re-united with Prometheus, and the scene ends with the word "Farewell."

If we consider Shelley's poem up to this point, though it cannot claim to be a complete drama, it stands as well by itself as does the *Prometheus Vinctus*, the chief difference being that there were two actual plays to follow the *Prometheus Vinctus*, while Shelley's poem is the last play of an imaginary trilogy, and we feel quite sure that he could never have written those

[1] See Act II, Sc. 4, line 34.

[2] Cf. *Paradise Lost*, I, 214–218. A passage which Locock cites in connexion with *P.U.*, Act I, lines 232–234.

other two plays. He would not have had enough material of human character to fill them out, and he would have been far too impatient for the end to spend artistic pains enough upon them. Had his "lyrical drama" ended at this second scene of Act III, it would have contained most of the material needed for the close of a trilogy. We should never have been tempted to seek high and low for probable and improbable allegorical meanings; it would have stood simply on its own merit—a philosophical drama of which Prometheus is the hero and Jupiter the villain. It is when Shelley rushes on into descriptions of earthly paradises and rejoicing eternity that we are compelled to know that the real hero of the whole play was that invariable hero of Shelley's, the Millennium. And though there is no hero whose fortunes concern each one of us so nearly, none whom Shelley could so often celebrate with such passionate inspiration, we are unwilling to merge, even in so great a theme, the actual Prometheus to whom Shelley had given life, and in the third and fourth scenes of Act III we see him slowly asphyxiated before our eyes in the vapours of a universal carouse.

Yet even in these scenes, when the vapours part, some of Shelley's most subtle and illuminating ideas shine out in a glory of music and imagery. The cave where Prometheus will dwell is not to be a wholly unearthly paradise. It is to be in touch with human life, a place where meet all "the echoes of the human world." It is to be visited by all that the newly-freed race of man shall discover of beauty and power:

> ". . . the progeny immortal
> Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy,
> And arts, though unimagined, yet to be."

Shelley would by no means have his Millennium a state of mere bliss. Even Art is to partake in the sacred mysteries of what we should now call evolution.

A little later in this scene he uses his famous and often repeated image:

> "Death is the veil which those who live call life:
> They sleep, and it is lifted."

At the end of the following scene the spirit of the Hour, returning from his voyage among the now redeemed inhabitants of the earth, says:

> "The painted veil, by those who were, called life,
> Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,
> All men believed or hoped, is torn aside."

And then again, it says that man is not

> ". . . yet exempt
> From chance, and death, and mutability."

Death, therefore, is here used by Shelley in two different senses. There is that death, the passing out of the ken of fellow-men, about which Shelley does not tell us more than Mr. Clutton-Brock knows. There is death, in another sense, which the new race has overcome—a thing of fear, and of illusion, in its nature part and parcel of that unreal and unsatisfying life of old, that mere pretence of life which mocked with meaningless shadows the desires of the human soul. It was man's idea of life that was responsible for his idea of death; indeed, that unreal life *was* the only real death. To the new man death is merely

> ". . . the last embrace of her
> Who takes the life she gave, even as a mother,
> Folding her child, says, 'Leave me not again.'"

Before the close of this act—the original end of the play—Shelley clearly expresses the view that man has been largely responsible for his own miseries and misdeeds. Even now, though Nature has participated in his redemption, and there are neither storms nor poisonous plants, man is subject to "chance, and death, and mutability," bu spiritually they cannot touch him. He has reached the highest human development, but he is still earthly man.

In Act IV, "[illegible] it man, and Time has be [illegible] : the Hours arrive upon : [illegible] ious remark (the source of much mystification to Editors[1]), "Where are their chariots?" The Hours walk now, they have no need to run.

Amidst much flagging and long-spun-out lyric, this act contains some of Shelley's finest blank verse, as well as the magnificent elemental pæans which form part of the lengthy *conversations between the Earth and Moon.*

But perhaps the most interesting things to be noticed in this act are two. One, as bad a piece of poetry as was ever composed by any man, here produced by one of the greatest of lyric poets; and the other, perhaps the finest passage of pure sermonizing, the most successfully audacious moral appeal ever affixed to any poem, didactic or other, and here

[1] Locock suggests that the Hours, "being on a holiday, have come without their chariots."

given by a poet who vowed that didactic poetry was his abhorrence. When the Moon is becoming quite overpowered by her passion for the Earth, she remarks:

> "So when thy shadow falls on me,
> Then am I mute and still, by thee
> Covered; of thy love, Orb most beautiful,
> Full, oh, too full!"

Of the glorious exhortation with which Demogorgon addresses the Earth and Moon, the Constellations, the Heavenly powers, the Dead, the Genii, Spirits, and Meteors, and Mists, and Man, nothing need be said; it is one of the few passages in Shelley that have really echoed hitherto with something of a trumpet-call among mankind.

CHAPTER VIII

SHELLEY'S LYRICS

"Not a senseless, trancèd thing,
But divine melodious truth;
Philosophic numbers smooth;
Tales and golden histories
Of heaven and its mysteries."
Keats: "Bards of Passion and of Mirth."

COLERIDGE'S first volume of verses contained fifty-one poems. Of these, thirty-six were entitled "*Effusion.*" There was *Effusion to the Autumnal Moon*, *Effusion to Mercy*, *Effusion to a Young Ass*,[1] and so on. "What you do retain," wrote Lamb when Coleridge was preparing a new edition, "call Sonnets, for heaven's sake, and not Effusions." For, in fact, Coleridge's *Effusions* were in most cases *Sonnets*—the most finely wrought and closely knit of lyric forms. Nowadays we should be more likely to call ninety-nine club-footed lines of *vers libre* a Sonnet, than anything an Effusion, the reason being perhaps self-evident: we cannot write sonnets. It is perhaps the misfortune of the Romantics that we cannot. Their influence—wrongly interpreted—has led to the steady abandonment of form and style in poetry, till a mere chunk of descriptive verse or the blurred sketch of an effete emotion is held to constitute a poem. But the Romantics themselves, though so often misrepresented as rebels against form and style, were attached to both as few poets had been before since the age of Horace and Virgil.

The first slight turning towards true romance by those poets of the eighteenth century who began to write again of Nature with reverence, and human emotions with seriousness, was associated with a kind of realism which very nearly cancelled all their gains. Their form was often not form, but formality, and their subject-matter tended to that peculiar kind of realism which can become the most lifeless of all literary fashions—as the present state of literature abundantly

[1] A very serious poem too

proves. Poetic style had been ruined by the rhyming couplet, with its frequent conversational drone, as of a witty salon, with its cultured repartee, and vehement superficiality. And the rhyming couplet is only a step nearer to form than is *vers libre*. The one has no rules at all, and the other, except when epigrammatic, has none that are inherent in its subject-matter. The majority of the poets of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had no living form at all—but "musty laws" and "compass vile"—and their task, though perhaps not "easy," was a rather mechanical exercise of the intellect:

> ". . . with a puling infant's force
> They swayed about upon a rocking-horse,
> And thought it Pegasus." [1]

The Romantic poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats—saved literature by re-creating the genuine literary conventions—conventions in style, diction, and subject-matter. Wordsworth, for example, though he took over a great deal of the "realism" of his immediate predecessors, in all his best work is thoroughly ideal in subject, and not realistic in diction. He uses fearlessly the whole full quiver of poetic language; the "thou" and the "doth" and all the traditional vocabulary:

> "A slumber did my spirit seal" . . .
> "From low to high doth dissolution climb" . . .
> "Milton, thou should'st be living at this hour" . . .
> "Dear Child! Dear Girl! that walkest with me here" . . .

He was afraid of nothing. He could wield the two-edged sword of the English language, that sword which the timid stylist who seeks to pick out words of Saxon origin or avoid those of Latin, or who rules out expressions which could never sound archaic if Shakespeare were familiar reading, blunts and breaks.[2]

These poets restored to poetry her proper subject-matter, which is not the real but the ideal. And they worked

[1] See Keats's *Sleep and Poetry*, l. 181 foll. Incidentally, one cannot help wondering if Keats borrowed this image from Hunt, in whose Autobiography we read: "In the room at the end of the garden was a magnificent rocking-horse, which a friend had given my little boy; and Lord Byron, with a childish glee becoming a poet, would ride upon it. Ah! why did he ever ride his Pegasus to less advantage?"

[2] Part of the grandeur of the second line quoted is due to the effect of that one long Latin word embedded amongst Anglo-Saxon monosyllables; and there is an exact repetition of this effect in the last line of the same sonnet:

> "Or the unimaginable touch of Time."

is an example. Still more striking is the last chorus to *Hellas*, with its sudden break at the last stanza:

> "O cease! must hate and death return?"

a question followed, but not answered, by the mournful aspiration of the end:

> "The world is weary of the past,
> O might it die or rest at last!"

The circular lyric—in the hands of a master—is perhaps, artistically, the most perfect form. Shelley uses it rarely. Keats could use it magnificently, enriching it as he worked into a ring all set with jewels, as in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Pale and loitering the stricken knight is at the beginning, pale and loitering at the end, but in following out the circle the imagination has become more and more impressed with his doom and his despair, and the withered sedge and birdless woods strike with so much more desolation at the close. Keats—and he was more thoroughly an artist than Shelley—liked best to round off his poems, or at least to glide gently down to earth again from his great heights:

> "Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
> In the next valley glades:
> Was it a vision or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?"

Shelley could never have achieved this; he could not, and he would not.

> "I am borne darkly, fearfully afar;
> Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
> The soul of Adonais, like a star,
> Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are."

The end was everything to Shelley, and the end must aspire. His restless soaring spirit nearly always tended to lift the conclusion of his poem into a higher and ever higher plane. He *could* compose a finished and rounded lyric, but only if it were short, and perhaps slight, for it was essential that he should not get over-excited with his theme. We can see how well he could do it from "Music when soft voices die," or "I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden," or the verses to "Time" beginning and ending with the words "Unfathomable Sea." To this kind belongs also the little six-lined poem, lovely, but little known because it is invariably classed as a fragment,

though in everything but the two unrhymed last lines—and they are singularly effective—it seems as unfragmentary as a globe of dew:

> "Ye gentle visitations of calm thought—
> Moods like the memories of happier earth,
> Which come arrayed in thoughts of little worth,
> Like stars in clouds by the weak winds enwrought,
> But that the clouds depart and stars remain,
> While they remain, and ye, alas, depart."

The invocation *To Night*—"Swiftly walk over the Western wave"—be[illegible] crease of i[illegible] the effect c[illegible] we get, per[illegible] He never [illegible] move directly above the spot from which he sprang.

[illegible] use [illegible] for [illegible] cul[illegible] Spirit of Intellectual Beauty:

> "Thou that to human thought art nourishment
> Like darkness to a dying flame!"

he is not idly poetizing. To him the image is perfectly clear, and expresses what he himself experienced when he descended into the calm vast darkness of the soul's dim meditation to bring forth a little spark of thought. He gives the further and contrasting development, when the spark becomes a great fire, in the *Skylark*:

> "Like a poet hidden
> In the light of thought."

His poetry becomes much less obscure when it is once realized that for him thoughts, emotions, dreams, the whole realm of the spirit, were as definite—as concrete—as the flames and clouds and stars with which he compares them. Hence his curious way of giving these things a separate life, and of drawing comparisons between the forces of Nature and the subtle workings of the spirit. He sees the mental phenomena quite as clearly as the natural, and in dealing with these he uses metaphors which are wonderfully vivid and accurate. There is a striking example of this power in *Alastor*. The poet is gazing into a forest pool:

". . . His eyes beheld
Their own wan light through the reflected lines
Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth
Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave,
Sees its own treacherous likeness there."

In *Prometheus Unbound* a very remarkable instance is the description of Panthea's trance, where the metaphor is woven into the whole texture of the passage with equal art and naturalness, as if it were the only possible image to convey his meaning. And every portion of it is illuminating. Shelley's metaphors are usually employed to bring into relation with the seen and known the invisible and ideal; they are thus an integral part of the whole aspiring course of his poetic themes.

Equally relevant are his descriptions of Nature. They are rarely mere adornments—never when he is writing well; they are in a sense dramatic. They contribute something essential to the subject-matter of the poem, and if quoted by themselves, may be as much weakened as dramatic poetry is, wrested from its context.[1] For Shelley does not write *about* winds and waters, he writes by means of them. *To Jane: The Recollection* might seem, at a first glance, to be mainly a poem of description; but it is nothing of the kind. It begins by telling us that Jane and the day were alike in their beauty and their brightness. Then in the second stanza we read that the day was so calm

"It seemed as if the hour were one
Sent from beyond the skies,
Which scattered from above the sun
A light of Paradise."

Imperceptibly we have become aware that Jane was, as Shelle called her in one of his letters, "a spirit of embodied peace. There is magic in the silence of the ocean, and the woods- so often vehement; and the centre of that magic circle "W one fair form that filled with love The lifeless atmospher Then Shelley seems to turn again from Jane to Nature:

"We paused beneath the pools that lie
Under the forest bough. . . .
There lay the glade and neighbouring lawn,
And through the dark green wood
The white sun twinkling like the dawn
Out of a speckled cloud.

[1] The same is true, of course, of most great lyrics; but in She case particularly it needs to be emphasized, as his poems are so treated as genuine "effusions."

Sweet views which in our world above
  Can never well be seen,
Were imaged by the water's love
  Of that fair forest green."

The words "fair" and "love" occurring again, remind us of the "fair form" of the preceding stanza, and delicately reveal the poet's feelings for his companion, whose virtues are so wonderfully expressed by this still summer afternoon.

"Like one beloved the scene had lent
  To the dark water's breast,
Its every leaf and lineament
  With more than truth expressed;
Until an envious wind crept by,
  Like an unwelcome thought,
Which from the mind's too faithful eye
  Blots one dear image out.
Though thou art ever fair and kind,
  The forests ever green,
Less oft is peace in Shelley's mind

would be astonished if its structure should be laid bare before him, so great is the art it conceals.[1] The images of leaves and waves and clouds, of red and yellow and black, of fire and sun and storm, of forest, ocean, and the heavens, are woven in and out of every stanza, and not one strand is broken short. But even this is only in a sense Shelley's technique; the growth of his idea is responsible for the whole magnificent structure. And his idea always climbs from that which appears to be concrete, from images of the familiar earth, to what the world has hitherto agreed to call abstract, to images of the unrealized. From the winter of the earth to the winter of humanity; from the rebirth of the seed to the resurrection of the soul; from the forests of Nature, swept in the first stanza by the wind that is both Destroyer and Preserver, to the wilderness of humanity in the last, to be quickened by the spirit of poetry itself which Shelley is invoking and using in the same breath.

To a Skylark, in perfect harmony with its subject, soars not in one spiral but in many. Every stanza, or group of stanzas, contains its own soaring theme; but through all sound the two dominating emotions, the poet's envy and his joy. In stanza viii the lark is compared to a poet; in Stanza xx he is told how much greater is the power of his joy than all the resources of the poet's art. Yet above this contrast between the bird's "clear, keen joyance" and the ever-restless human heart, sounds the note with which the poem begins and ends, the poet's inexhaustible delight in the song. "Hail to thee, blithe spirit!" he cries when he first hears it, and he ends, while still the lark sings, "as I am listening now." Again we think of the contrast in Keats. "Fled is that music—do I wake or sleep?" For Keats's nightingale was a real bird, and has flown away: a bird only rendered immortal by its power in succeeding generations over the heart of man—"Thou wert not born for death, immortal bird." But Shelley cries: "Hail to thee, blithe spirit, Bird thou never wert." "'Tis not from envy of thy happy lot," says Keats, "But being too happy in thy happiness." But Shelley's poem is full of that strain of mournful envy—envy of the bird's art and of its joy. Keats is content to be left uncertain if it were a dream—forlorn yet reconciled. Shelley is left still listening, and still longing. It is the difference between the two poets: Keats was content with beauty; Shelley was only content with hope.

[1] It has been very skilfully analysed, from certain aspects, by Stopford Brooke, in an essay on *Shelley's Lyrics*.

The *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* is a poem often regarded as not more than a beautiful rigmarole, and Mary says she had to persuade her husband to finish it.[1] It is, however, one of the very best examples of his art, and is perfectly consistent in its development, from its opening in sorrow to its close in hope, and in all its wonderful slow transition from the real to the ideal, and still more wonderfully from a poetic image to a prophetic vision.

"Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep, wide sea of Misery."

The poem begins in a realm of pure metaphor, and on a note of sorrow almost amounting to despair. Storm, and possible shipwreck, is the lot of the mariner who sails the seas of human life, and his only sure haven is the grave at last. And there what waits him? Here is the question Shelley in his mournful moods is always asking—that subject of "inexhaustible melancholy." What if the mariner have found no true love in life, and death be after all but that most appalling of all solitudes—the solitude of annihilation? His melancholy here gets the better of his poem, and the second section, lines 45–65, is a rather pointlessly gloomy description of dead men's bones lying on a desert shore where cries the sea-mew.[2] But in this passage occurs the first mention of a new strand in the theme, the political, and even the bones and sea-mew are relevant, as we shall see.

The poem is really of the nature of an ode; lines 1–65 form the first strophe. With line 66 the antistrophe begins. It takes us back to the metaphorical green isle, and to the mariner. We understand that the whole existence of the poem is due to the mariner having found that very morning one such refuge from the storms of life, and the metaphorical green isle has become real—that is its first metamorphosis. From the crest of one of the Euganean Hills which rises like a solitary island, Shelley has watched the dawn and found consolation in the majesty and beauty of Nature—the circling rooks, the drifting mist, the splendid sunrise, the ensuing calm serenity of day. But from his island he looks forth upon the sea where are other mariners, and other islands.

[1] [illegible] effect depends.

[2] It seems quite likely that Trelawny's legend of the sea-mew at Shelley's cremation is derived from this passage.

"Beneath is spread like a green sea
The waveless plain of Lombardy,
Bounded by the vaporous air,
Islanded by cities fair;
Underneath Day's azure eyes
Ocean's nursling, Venice, lies,
A peopled labyrinth of walls,
Amphitrite's destined halls."

Venice, too, the sea shall overwhelm—the hint is barely let fall, and he passes on, describing how the sun rises behind the beautiful city:

"And before that chasm of light,
As within a furnace bright,
Column, tower, and dome, and spire,
Shine like obelisks of fire,
Pointing with inconstant motion
From the altar of dark ocean
To the sapphire-tinted skies;
As the flames of sacrifice. . . ."

And again he strikes a note of doom. Not all the beauty of the scene on which he gazes from his own brief place of refuge can blind him to the throes of other men. Venice he sees, an actual island which the actual sea must sink. But he sees more than this: he sees her degradation, which is worse than any watery grave.

"Sun-girt city, thou hast been
Ocean's child, and then his queen;
Now is come a darker day,
And thou soon must be his prey,
If the power that raised thee here
Hallow so thy watery bier.[1]
A less drear ruin then than now,
With thy conquest-branded brow
Stooping to the slave of slaves
From thy throne, among the waves,
Wilt thou be, when the sea-mew
Flies, as once before it flew,
O'er thine isles depopulate. . . ."

The day will come when over the drowned bones of Venice the sea-mew alone will fly, and the fisherman will hurry over the ruins in his boat, in superstitious dread. The antistrophe echoes the theme of the strophe, but from the idea of the single human life battling against the storms he has passed to that of a whole people. And now the theme of political struggle takes more and more possession of him.

[1] This would seem to mean what is affirmed more fully in the following lines: better to be Venice drowned than Venice enslaved.

"Those who alone thy towers behold
Quivering through aëreal gold,
As I now behold them here,
Would imagine not they were
Sepulchres, where human forms,
Like pollution-nourished worms,
To the corpse of greatness cling,
Murdered, and now mouldering."

To Shelley not all the beauty of a dawning summer day can make earth wholly fair while tyranny is abroad. Earth, he says, would be better without Venice, if she will not strive for freedom. Then he passes on to a tremendous eulogy of Byron, who meant much to him at this time (he had just been composing *Julian and Maddalo*). Moreover, Byron in Venice stood for liberty.

The next section reminds us how all this while the sun has been mounting in the sky, and morning broadening into mid-day. He never forgets the moods and movements of Nature, which are part of the life of his poem. The light has passed from behind Venice in the east, and he turns his eyes and his thoughts on Padua. And there too dwells beauty bereft of liberty.

"Many-domèd Padua proud
Stands, a peopled solitude,
'Mid the harvest-shining plain,
Where the peasant heaps his grain
In the garner of his foe,
And the milk-white oxen slow
With the purple vintage strain,
Heaped upon the creaking wain,
That the brutal Celt[1] may swill
Drunken sleep with savage will,
And the sickle to the sword
Lies unchanged, though many a lord,
Like a weed whose shade is poison,
Overgrows this region's foison,
Sheaves of whom are ripe to come
To destruction's harvest-home:
Men must reap the things they sow,
Force from force must ever flow,
Or worse; but 'tis a bitter woe
That love or reason cannot change
The despot's rage, the slave's revenge."

"Love . . . cannot change"—Shelley is looking out upon the deep wide sea of Misery. He sees at least that love has not changed it yet. Upon this noble passage follow lines 236–255, and would they did not. A worked-up hate was a thing he

[1] Celt = Austrian.

could unfortunately admit even into his finest compositions; and indignation needs to be very hot if it is not to chill the poetic fire. Resentment remembered in tranquillity is the worst possible ingredient of a poem. Fortunately there are but twenty lines of it. The next section is enriched with one of the most sustained and vivid images to be found even in Shelley:

"In thine halls the lamp of learning,
Padua, now no more is burning;
. . . .
Now new fires from antique light
Spring beneath the wide world's might;
But their spark lies dead in thee,
Trampled out by Tyranny.
As the Norway woodman quells,
In the depth of piny dells,
One light flame among the brakes,
While the boundless forest shakes,
And its mighty trunks are torn
By the fire thus lowly born:
The spark beneath his feet is dead,
He starts to see the flames it fed
Howling through the darkened sky
With a myriad tongues victoriously,
And sinks down in fear; so thou,
O Tyranny, beholdest now
Light around thee, and thou hearest
The loud flames ascend, and fearest;
Grovel on the earth: ay, hide
In the dust thy purple pride!"

And in the poet himself the spark of hope, first gleaming in the earlier passage:

"Sheaves of whom are ripe to come
To destruction's harvest-home,"

has taken fire. Man must and will rebel at length against the powers of evil; this much of hope at least may cheer the mariner on those dark seas.

Perhaps it is this gleam of consolation that brings the poet back to his joy in the natural world, and gives birth to the most beautiful passage in the poem—one of the most beautiful passages he ever wrote:

"Noon descends around me now:
'Tis the noon of autumn's glow,
When a soft and purple mist
Like a vaporous amethyst,
Or an air-dissolvèd star
Mingling light and fragrance, far

From the curved horizon's bound
To the point of Heaven's profound,
Fills the overflowing sky;
And the plains that silent lie
Underneath, the leaves unsodden
Where the infant Frost has trodden
With his morning-wingèd feet,
Whose bright print is gleaming yet."

Now it is in a sea of light that he sees at his feet, not cities, but the

"... olive sandalled Apennine
In the South dimly islanded;
And the Alps, whose snows are spread
High between the clouds and sun;
And of living things each one;
And my spirit which so long
Darkened this swift stream of song,
Interpenetrated lie
By the glory of the sky:
Be it love, light, harmony,
Odour, or the soul of all
Which from Heaven like dew doth fall,
Or the mind which feeds this verse
Peopling the lone universe."

That beauty of N[illegible] so strengthened h[illegible] is no longer a sha[illegible] faith, perhaps in [illegible] and in the creative mind and heart of man. Now, though his day and its dreams are over, the sun setting, and he again *compelled to embark, while his ancient pilot Pain sits beside* the helm again, he can see something beyond the strife of slave and tyrant, and some better hope than of rebellion. The themes of his poem have united and widened into a great river running to the sea; he has passed from his own sorrows [illegible]

"Where for me, and those I love
May a windless bower be built,
Far from passion, pain, and guilt,

. . . .

"We may live so happy there,
That the Spirits of the Air,
Envying us, may even entice
To our healing Paradise
The polluting multitude;
But their rage would be subdued
By that clime divine and calm.

. . . .

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[illegible]

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Envying us, may even entice
To our healing Paradise
The polluting multitude;
But their rage would be subdued
By that clime divine and calm.

. . . .

"And the love which heals all strife
Circling, like the breath of life,
All things in that sweet abode
With its own mild brotherhood:
They, not it, would change; and soon
Every sprite beneath the moon
Would repent its envy vain,
And the earth grow young again."

"But 'tis a bitter woe . . . love cannot change." His faith has been restored to him, and he knows that love, and only love, *can* change the sorrows and errors of man.

And it will be love like that which inspired these *Lines among the Euganean Hills.* Not content with an island of refuge in the kingdom of his own mind—an island of solitude; not content with an actual island, however fair, whence he sees Venice and Padua, and remembers the sufferings there of other men; not even content with a hoped-for Elysium where he and those he loves may find a world in harmony with Nature's beauty; he is content only with a paradise that shall receive all men, and make them whole. This is that zenith towards which Shelley's soaring spirals always rise. Sometimes he allows himself, as here, to picture the paradise he sees and hopes. Sometimes he feels even poetry cannot convey the height of his yearning, the vastness of his prophecy, and then he concludes, not with any descent to earth, but with a confession that Art can do no more:

". . . Woe is me!
The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
Into the heights of Love's rare Universe,
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire—
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!"

It was Medwin who had the intelligence to recognize that Shelley could write odes; for he knew from his curious, keer jerry-built classical learning what an ode is. An ode grow: it must not merely expand; its central idea often has the effec of a pebble thrown into a still pool of water; it stirs innumei able ripples of poetic thought, which develop concentricall and embrace a wider and wider field. And just as ther seems to be no link between one widening ring and the nex so the transitions in an ode may seem to lack connexion— but there is always an inner growth, and always a mutua relationship to the point whence every ring began.[1] And a ode must have plenty of room to develop. In this poen

[1] The development of theme in Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations o Immortality*, for example, is exactly of this kind.

of experience and suffering, and the most perfect fruit of his long struggle to blend philosophy and art.

None of these four great poems are more than faintly touched with Shelley's peculiar faults, and they belong to that mood of his genius which produced his greatest work—a mood in which his compassion for humanity and his joy in beauty were perfectly reconciled. His poems belong to four distinct types. There are the poems sacrificed to his own opinions and prejudices—poems where his enthusiasm of humanity is disturbing, not inspiring him. Such is *Queen Mab*, entirely, and portions of the *Revolt of Islam*, the *Ode to Liberty*, and the *Ode to Naples*. These poems have too much *thought*. *Alastor*, and a good deal of the *Revolt of Islam*, have perhaps too little. Most of the remaining poems suffer from neither of these faults, but their power depends very greatly upon whether Shelley is writing with his whole heart. The poems purely about himself, his sorrows and his loves, are never his very greatest, because the nature of his real inspiration, the basis of all his deep passion, was a love for man, nature, and God, the very reverse of self-centred. For this reason not even *Epipsychidion* can be placed beside the *Ode to the West Wind* or the two superb choruses of *Hellas*.

In connexion with *Epipsychidion* Shelley committed two big blunders. He left unburned the passages usually printed at the end of the poem, which he had presumably poured out in a mood of self-indulgence and solitude; and he left in the middle of the poem itself " such merely personal allusions as can only perplex and irritate the patience and intelligence of a loyal student, while they may not impossibly afford an opening for preposterous and even offensive interpretations." These are the words of Swinburne, whose moral instinct, though a veritable Cassandra to his own soul, rarely misled him in his judgments of the morals and manners of Art and Life. " In all poetry," he says, " as in all religions, mysteries must have place, but riddles should find none." But with the exception of these passages, he judges of *Epipsychidion* that " the high, sweet, mystic doctrine of this poem is apprehensible enough to all who look into it with purged eyes, and listen with purged ears." One feels, however, that the poet himself should take care fitly to prepare his readers' hearing for his high doctrine. The beginning of *Epipsychidion* is much of it out of keeping with the wonderful consummation of love described in its closing passages. Shelley had attempted this difficult theme once before, again with only partial success. Yet the close of the sixth canto of the *Revolt of Islam*, describing the nuptials

of Laon and Cythna, contains passages, though little known, which are in some ways superior to anything in *Epipsychidion*.

Shelley could commit three grave poetical faults. In all his longer poems he is pretty sure to commit one or all of them, and though two would appear to be mere faults of technique, they all seem to derive from the same thing. It is as if a

casual verse form—suffering, in fact, from a lack of discipline. But far more astonishing are his failures of ear. No intellectual flagging alone could betray the master of such incomparable music into lines like "Harmonizing this Earth with what we feel above,"[3] or "On its mate's music-panting bosom,"[4] or into the barrel-organ bathos of "She turned to me and smiled—that smile was Paradise!"[5] or this most remarkable couplet of the fragmentary *Scene from Tasso*:

> "Did you inform his Grace that Signor Pigna
> Waits with state-papers for his signature?"

And he had a certain weakness for abominable jerky see-saw metres like those he favoured in his raw youth, and never quite abandoned.[6]

[1] A notable example is the much-praised ending to the *Cenci*, with its long series of "wells" and "farewells" and the extraordinary remarks of Beatrice:

> "Here, mother, tie
> My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
> In any simple knot; ay, that does well.
> And yours I see is coming down."

Even a maiden about to be relieved of her head need hardly be on such distant terms with her own hair as to refer to it as "this hair"; nor on such vacuously familiar terms with her doomed mother as to care to tell her, almost with her last breath, that her hair is ...

[2] Such as that in Act II of P ... vii, p. 214, and the passage in T ... p. 233.

[3] *P.U.*, Act II, sc. 5, line 97.

[4] *Ibid.*, Act II, sc. 2, line 29.

[5] *Revolt of Islam*, canto ix, st 36.

[6] For example, *The Vision of the Sea* and *The Fugitives*, and the Songs of the fifth and sixth Spirits in *P. U.*, Act I. The metre of the *Sensitive Plant* is often most uncomfortably jerky.

The explanation of all three faults is to be found in the worst of them. Just as there was in Shelley's moral character and judgment a certain weak spot, there was a weakness in his creative genius. These weaknesses have been so outrageously exaggerated by his foes, that his friends are tempted to slur them over. Yet no open mind can study his life and poems without noticing and regretting them. He was capable of the deepest and most earnest feelings, yet those feelings could be worked up into a frenzy by a ghost-story or an hysterical midnight conversation. And his imagination played a like trick with him when he was writing. We can see from the innumerable fragments of poems that he could mistake for genuine inspiration some passing emotional excitement, and set to work to write a poem which must either peter out in a few lines, or expand into a sentimental and pointless rigmarole. In the midst of his finest work a similar experience sometimes overtook him: he became excited by some idea actually tawdry, or irrelevant to his subject—and then he would write with a chilly sentimentality, or long-windedly, or inharmoniously.

These mistakes never sprang from hurry. Shelley could afford to write rapidly, for when his inspiration was genuine, it was so intense that, as he told Trelawny, "when my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off." It was a sign of strength that he could write so fast, not as Keats supposed, of weakness.[1] And equally a sign of strength are his successful irregularities. When he was composing with deep and genuine emotion—and he rarely composed in tranquillity—he could leave his poems full of technical flaws, one stanza differing from another, or a rhyme omitted, or a change of metre; and he could do so with impunity. For at such moments his artistic instincts were keenly alive. It was then that he could write lines apparently trivial, or use the commonest phrases, the most hackneyed images, and make them thrill with his passion.

"After the slumber of the year
The woodland violets reappear."

It might be a little bit from Mrs. Hemans. But let us see it in its context—in a poem of three stanzas, of which the second

[1] Keats to Shelley, August, 1820: "I am in expectation of *Prometheus* every day. Could I have my own wish effected, you would have it still in manuscript, or be now putting an end to the second act."

differs from the other two in the arrangement of the rhymes, and in each of which there are only five equal four-foot lines and two rhymes.

"When passion's trance is overpast,
If tenderness and truth could last,
Or live, whilst all wild feelings keep
Some mortal slumber, dark and deep,
I should not weep, I should not weep!

"It were enough to feel, to see,
Thy soft eyes gazing tenderly,
And dream the rest—and burn and be
The secret food of fires unseen,
Couldst thou but be as thou hast been.

"After the slumber of the year
The woodland violets reappear;
All things revive in field or grove,
And sky and sea, but two, which move
And form all others, life and love."

The last stanza shows once more how Shelley used Nature in poetry: writing not about it, but with it. The simple idyllic notes struck by the first three lines emphasize as nothing else could the poem's unexpected and poignant close.

The boldest of his metrical innovations bears itself off triumphantly when he is writing with conviction. "Fresh Spring and Summer, and Winter hoar," has appeared to many a defective line—but only to those who can discern the beat of the rhythm, and the stress of the accent, but cannot hear the beat and stress of the heart. "The music of this line taken with its context," writes Swinburne, "I should have thought was a thing to thrill the veins and draw tears to the eyes. . . ." Yet W. M. Rossetti "foisted in," as Swinburne puts it, "the word 'Autumn' after the word 'Summer.' "Fresh Spring and Summer, and Winter hoar"—the lingering over the word "Summer," the pause, and the break before the words "and Winter" convey as nothing else could the grief with which the poem is filled.

"Madonna, wherefore hast thou sent to me
Sweet-basil and mignonette?
Embleming love and health, which never yet
In the same wreath might be.
Alas, and they are wet!
Is it with thy kisses or thy tears?
For never rain or dew
Such fragrance drew
From plant or flower—the very doubt endears
My sadness ever new,
The sighs I breathe, the tears I shed for thee."

There is not an accent in this perfect stanza which is not fully meant; and the last rhyme "thee," falling as it does with a gentle unexpectedness, only serves to emphasize the tenderness of the address.

"Is it with thy kisses or thy tears?"

"Here," says Swinburne, "the same ineffable effect of indefinable sweetness is produced by an exact repetition (but let no aspiring 'poet-ape' ever think to reproduce it by imitation) of the same simple means—the suppression, namely, of a single syllable."

Usually, when Shelley suppresses a syllable in this manner, it is because he has lingered upon some other syllable and given it the value of two. He does this frequently, and with wonderful effect, with the word "far":

"Far, far away, O ye
Halcyons of Memory!"

And again, in the second stanza to *The Aziola*:

"Sad Aziola! many an eventide
Thy music I had heard
By wood and stream, meadow and mountain-side,
And fields and marshes wide,—
Such as nor voice, nor lute, nor wind, nor bird,
The soul ever stirred;
Unlike and far sweeter than them all.
Sad Aziola! from that moment I
Loved thee and thy sad cry."

Here syllables omitted in the sixth and seventh lines, combined with an ungrammatical expression, produce such music as only Shelley could make. "Fār swéeter" is the emphasis his heart gave the words.

The one sufficient explanation of Shelley's extraordinary lyrical effects is here. He had indeed "an inner and an outer music," and the whole effect of his metre and the very sound and sense of language can be changed by a change in his mood. Though it cannot be too clearly understood that both metre and mood are in the control of his art. One of the most charming effects of this kind occurs in the song, "Rarely, rarely comest thou, Spirit of Delight." All the stanzas in this poem, except one, have only monosyllabic rhymes; and the metre, though light, is never hurried, except in one stanza. In the third we read:

> "As a lizard with the shade
> Of a trembling leaf,[1]
> Thou with sorrow art dismayed;
> Even the sighs of grief
> Reproach thee, that thou art not near,
> And reproach thou wilt not hear."

Then comes the sudden change, with all its impatience, persuasiveness—almost mockery:

> "Let me set my mournful ditty
> To a merry measure;
> Thou wilt never come for pity,
> Thou wilt come for pleasure;"

and the serious close:

> "Pity then will cut away
> Those cruel wings, and thou wilt stay."

There is a still more subtle change of tone in the *Hymn of Pan*, a poem which is in any case a most wonderful metrical feat. The enchanting wistful drawl of the last line but one in each stanza creates a magic Pan-like atmosphere of itself alone:

> "The cicale above in the lime,
> And the lizards below in the grass,
> Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was,
> Listening to my sweet pipings"

How piquant this long-drawn "old Tmolus"; and, "Were silent with love as you now, Apollo, With envy . . . "—how provocative, this "Apollo"! But the third stanza is the most astonishing of all:

> "I sang of the dancing stars,
> I sang of the dædal Earth,
> And of Heaven—and the giant wars,
> And Love, and Death, and Birth—
> And then I changed my pipings—"

And he does: dreamily, mournfully—*for the first two lines*—he goes on—the rhythm is entirely changed:

> "Singing how down the vale of Mænalus
> I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed.
> Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!
> It breaks in our bosom, and then we bleed"

[1] [illegible] have been compared. It is interesting to note, also, that Shelley was familiar with the better reading (Bentley's) of lines 5 and 6 of Horace's ode.

What an outburst! It must be read with all the fervour that Shelley put into it—or it will not scan. "Góds and mén," the line begins with tremendous emphasis, and ends with two emphatic syllables "delúded thús"—and then the pathetic note again, and the long drawn out line with its childish accent of sorrow and complaint:

> "All wept, as I think both ye now would,
> If envy or age had not frozen your blood,
> At the sorrow of my sweet pipings."

In reading the work of Shelley's maturity it is well to remember—and how comparatively few of his critics do—that however ecstatic the music may appear, however visionary the theme, we are following the guidance of a very powerful mind, and entering into the experiences of a very deep nature. To read him with the idea that he is a child, in any sense whatever, is to land ourselves in the follies of such misinterpretations, such textual emendations, or annotations, as have been occasionally inflicted on his finest work, even from the time when his wife herself was editing them.

Shelley's use of words is enough in itself to give any man confidence in the firmer qualities of his genius. Both he and Byron favoured unusual and seemingly unaccommodating proper names: but Byron's use of them when it is not audaciously comical, is rarely quite whole-hearted. One of Shelley's biggest debts to Byron is for the word "Acroceraunian." But this is all that Byron made of it:

> "The Acroceraunian mountains of old name."

Shelley literally revels in it:

> "Arethusa arose
> From her couch of snows
> In the Acroceraunian mountains."

And again where Byron writes:

> "The wind swept down the Euxine, and the wave
> Broke foaming o'er the blue Symplegades."

Shelley had written:

> ". . . where, be there calm or breeze,
> The gloomiest of the drear Symplegades
> Shakes with the sleepless surge."

In his method of dealing with words—and not striking or strange words only—his "inner music" had a very remarkable effect upon his "outer music," making each a living instrument of his sorrow and his joy.

"The cloud shadows of midnight possess their own repose
For the weary winds are silent, and the moon is in the deep;
Some respite to its turbulence unresting Ocean knows;
Whatever moves or toils or grieves hath its appointed sleep.
Thou in the grave shalt rest."

It is not surprising that a poet who could fill so full with passion "the moon," "the deep," "the grave," should sometimes give to words of one syllable the value of two.

Naturally Shelley's genius did not lean to blank verse, for he had a very highly developed art of rhyme. The rhymes in his great lyrics are unique—their music is so perfect and so inevitable. There is never the least trace of effort in their simplicity and force. And while rhyme, even with the great poets, is often not more than an addition to the musical richness of the whole, Shelley's rhymes seem themselves to form the climax of his music, the emphasis of his passion, and sometimes to be very cries from his soul. The modern manner of reading poetry, by which the rhyme is hurried over and muffled up into the text, as if it were a thing not quite decent if exposed too nakedly to the view, makes havoc of Shelley. His rhymes nearly always achieve, either by means of a pause, or by position, or by sheer sonority and emphasis, a splendid and arresting isolation. As here:

"Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine æry surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!"

"Commotion" rings out because of the complex alliteration which it, as it were, resolves: "on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion." "Shed" is thrown into relief by the "shook" that follows. "Surge," the "dim verge" and the "zenith's height" are loud and grand. But far grander still is the thunderous chord, "Thou dirge . . ." followed by

the towering climax of "sepulchre," "atmosphere," and the final cry, "oh, hear!"—nothing quite like this has ever been done with language before.

That Shelley did however succeed in blank verse was really due to this power of breathing life and fire into words. In blank verse, he had said in his preface to *Islam*, "there is no shelter for mediocrity." He might even have said that there is no shelter for any talent that is not wholly and strikingly original. We can none of us endure the slightest Shakespearean echo. To live, blank verse must be created new, and Shelley so created it. He used all the materials, but used them freshly, as in that wonderful alliterative passage in *Prometheus Unbound*, where the changes are rung upon aspirated and unaspirated initial vowels:

"And hither come, sped on the charmèd winds,
Which meet from all the points of heaven, as bees
From every flower aëreal Enna feeds,
At their known island-homes in Himera,
The echoes of the human world. . . ." [1]

The effect is curiously lyrical, as Shelley's most original blank verse always is. He made of it an instrument, wholly suited to his peculiar purposes of lyrical drama. And he was evolving gradually a drama of his own, as well as a blank verse style. The fragments of *Charles the First*, written during the last two or three years of his life, are remarkable both as verse and drama, although as Shelley himself says, the subject was not after his own heart. The noble sketch of *Hellas* is more completely successful: it is dramatic, wholly ideal and visionary and yet most stirring and intensely alive. It is written with more poetic conviction than much of *Prometheus*, and Shelley has got the length of drawing a bad character—and an autocrat, too!—with redeeming points. His tyrant Mahmud is a striking and sympathetic figure, with that curious vein of philosophic aloofness with which poets have often endowed their kings. His misgivings and questionings of destiny, his visions of the future and the past, are arrestingly contrasted with his character and conduct as Ruler and Despot; just as the choruses of the Greek slaves, choruses that are a blend of despair and hope and prophecy, form a contrasting and ominous background to the hurrying messengers, with their stories of defeat and victory. The movement of the poem is at times almost breathlessly rapid:

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act III, Sc. 3, lines 40–44.

Mahmud: More gold? our ancestors bought gold with victory,
And shall I sell it for defeat?
Daood: The Janizars
Clamour for pay.
Mahmud: Go! bid them pay themselves
With Christian blood! Are there no Grecian virgins
Whose shrieks and spasms and tears they may enjoy?
No infidel children to impale on spears?
No hoary priests after that Patriarch
Who bent the curse against his country's heart,
Which clove his own at last? Go! bid them kill,
Blood is the seed of gold.
Daood: It has been sown,
And yet the harvest to the sicklemen
Is as a grain to each.
Mahmud: Then, take this signet,
Unlock the seventh chamber in which lie
The treasures of victorious Solyman,—
An empire's spoil stored for a day of ruin.
O spirit of my sires! is it not come?

And this poem Shelley modestly apologized for in his preface, on the ground that it was a "mere improvise," and must remain incomplete like the events it was commemorating. It was written, he says in a letter, "in one of those few moments of enthusiasm, which now seldom visit me, and which make me pay dear for their visits."

There have been few men, of whatever calling, who could be so stirred to ardent and creative passion by the fate of a small foreign country struggling for freedom. There have been still fewer whose passion sprang, as Shelley's did, from an idealist philosophy—by so many discarded as abstract—and who could dare to cherish in a single breast so much compassionate sorrow and so much hope. And it is the blend of all these things that gives to his poetry its peculiar power. His joy and his grief move like sun and shadow through all he wrote; and over all, like the deep sky above those Euganean Hills, dwells his unshakeable faith.

Such are the qualities of his nature that went to form that poignant and impassioned last chorus to *Hellas*, with the Elysian strains of the sixth stanza, and the almost despairing cry of the last:

"Saturn and Love their long repose
Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
Than many unsubdued:
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers,
But votive tears and symbol flowers.

"Oh, cease! must hate and death return?
Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past,
Oh, might it die or rest at last!"

Better for the world an everlasting sleep, than that man's succeeding generations should be perpetually broken on the wheel of his recurring sins and follies. But the real spirit of the Chorus is not despairing. It seems to say: You have made Greece: you can make a still fairer world, where Saturn and Love shall reign; but build it impregnably "above the idle foam of Time";[1] found it upon the eternal might of the spirit—so the wheel of suffering and change can touch it not.

[1] "If Greece must be
A wreck, yet shall its fragments reassemble,
And build themselves again impregnably
In a diviner clime,
To Amphionic music on some Cape sublime,
Which frowns above the idle foam of Time."
Hellas, lines 1002–1007.

CHAPTER IX

SOME SUGGESTIONS ON THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL AND ITS EFFECTS

"... As Angels in some lighter dreams
Call to the soul, when man doth sleep:
So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes,
And into glory peep."

Vaughan: Friends Departed.

TC[illegible]

Amongst [illegible] doubt, at that period as remarkable a crowd of singing birds as were ever heard at one time; but it was in company rather than in harmony that they all gave tongue. None of the accepted definitions of "romance" will include even the main writers of the period; or [illegible] at once Shelley and Sco[illegible] Byron. If Scott loved [illegible] *Neither* were priests of "wild nature." And as for "wonder," Scott's happy complacency, the shallow creed of Byron, the dogmatism of Wordsworth, seem curiously out of place in an Age of Wonder.

If it was indeed a "Romantic Age," it was so because of [illegible]es than "curiosity [illegible]

trappings which descended to the following age and provided the fancy dress in which intensely Victorian ideas of morality, passion and metaphysics masqueraded in the poems of Tennyson, Rossetti and Browning. The only genuinely romantic poet is he who uses romantic subject matter; who deals in the romantic attitude to life. And that attitude is clearly not [illegible]

[1] See H. Beers, *History of Romanticism in the XVII*[illegible]

pendent upon mystery and curiosity, first love and pictur-que scenery. A return to Nature is no more necessary to than are strange adventures. Lamb found more romance n the brawling of London alleys than in the mountains of Westmorland; Landor was more romantic at eighty than at five and twenty; Byron's life was never so romantic as when he set to work to drill a handful of foreign soldiers at Missolonghi. "To be feminine, kind and genteelly dressed," wrote Coleridge in 1822, "these were the only things to which my head, heart, or imagination had any polarity, and what I was then, I still am." "Wonders are no wonders to me," said Keats, musing upon his highest ambitions in poetry, "I am more at home amongst men and women."

If we ask ourselves what is romance, in history, in art, and in the individual life, we shall get no doubt a vague and oracular answer, for its manifestations have been varied. But we shall find, I think, that romance is inseparable from a certain kind of faith in man, a mystical faith perhaps, not depending upon mundane manifestations of his power, but upon some sense of the inherent greatness of his soul—a hope, perhaps, that he is more than mortal. If the bend of a sunlit road, a bar of music, or the glimpse of a face suddenly thrills us with romance it is because these things have brought some unexpected revelation of the value of human life:

> "I did but see her passing by,
> And yet I love her till I die."

So unreasonable a thing, so inspired a thing is romance. interpretation of this kind, however indefinite and gene will serve to clear up several difficulties. It will enable to understand why so many poets who used romantic mate are yet felt to be in their esence no true Romantics. It show in what sense the whole period of the early ninet century really was a Romantic Age; and why the genu romantic spirit in literature was yet so limited and pro short lived. And we shall see this spirit developing th out preceding ages in close association with those twin c of Imagination—Religion and Poetry.

The Imagination of the primitive savage, seeking esque idols and huge beasts, but never in the soul of r consolation and hope, was as devoid of romance as th of his tom-tom or his bull-roarer. The savage mocked.

In the Greek and Jewish Poetry and Faith, the

great outbursts of civilization which mainly concern the ... ified and honoured: ... Religion and Litera- ... n, though the latter ... are both lacking ... as it emerged ... ed civilization and established, now here, now there, an organized national culture, was filled, it is true, with a mood of intense relish for actual present existence, and of pride in human achieve-

literature, in that nature-loving myth-weaving poetry which has been ever since the fountain-head of the romantic style; it appeared also in the outward show of a Religion which imagined a host of brilliant and beautiful gods all more or

without the idea of love—a magnificent courageous moral conception of the Everlasting No. Man was a protégé—and nothing more. What saved him from the degradation of the savage Caliban under his Setebos was the great Greek faith in the morality of the gods. But the moral laws were not of his making; not necessarily even comprehensible to him; he could not be virtuous in his own right; his happiness was an accident, and he must beware of offending the gods by forgetting his place; he must remember that he is only a mortal. He is tolerated in the universe, but not beloved. The dramas of Æschylus and Sophocles are full of intense reverence for the moral law as these poets understood it, and of a fine pity for man; but they lack tenderness, and except in a very limited direction they lack passion. They are moving as a storm at sea is moving—by virtue of their tragic violence. They could teach courage and conscience; they could not teach hope and love. The most famous Greek heroes are great only by virtue of their power—power as warriors or statesmen—and this power is always nothing when compared with the power of the gods; their virtue is as a shadow of some unintelligible divine idea; their life is a span; their feelings and sufferings mere unimportant circumstances of earthly experience.

> τίς ἐφαμερίων ἄρηξις; . . .
> ὀλιγοδρανίαν, ἄκικυν, ἰσόνειρον . . .
> οὔποτε
> τὰν Διὸς ἁρμονίαν
> θνατῶν παρεξίασι βουλαί.[1]

We find an echo of a kind in Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

The Jewish Faith and Literature had none of the classical-romantic grace and joy. But it had more of the true spirit of romance. There was far less beauty in the Jewish conception, and far more hope. The Greek had lived wholly in the past and in the present; of the future he has nothing to tell us. The Jew looked backward, and looked forward: the present was his dark hour. One great advance he made upon the Greek ideal; he believed himself—not humanity, but himself—beloved of God. Beloved of a jealous God—arbitrarily beloved, still a protégé, but a protégé with claims. The Jew did not feel himself divine in his own right—but the idea of the divinity of the Jew had dawned upon him.

And then came Christ. And Christ taught that all men were divine. That man was of one nature with God. "No more a servant but a son, and if a son then an heir of God." [Gal. iv. 1.] That his own feelings which hitherto had seemed almost only painful accompaniments of human existence, that those feelings were the best interpreters of God that he had: that to love God and his fellow-men was the chief glory of life. Love was thus raised from a mere incident of ephemeral mortality to the preoccupation of eternity. The heroes of the Greeks were great only because of their power of achievement: the Christian hero is great also because of his power of emotion. The value of the human being went up. Women and children, waverers and dreamers, the Hamlets of life, the men who are failures like Brutus, or Richard II, were no longer shut out from the stage of greatness with which poetry is concerned. The effect upon the whole course of subsequent literature must be obvious. What Christ did for poetry is a subject of inexhaustible interest. He was the first Romantic; and the greatest.

Christ invested his religious meaning in a form as near as possible to poetry because imaginative conceptions needed imaginative language to convey them. But only too soon after his death his followers tore the two asunder, and his

[1] "What help is there in the ephemeral race of man? . . . feeble, shadowy, short-lived. . . . Never shall will of theirs prevail against the concord of Heaven."—*Æschylus*, *Prometheus Vinctus*, ll. 564 foll.

ideas, robbed of their best means of expression, soon lost much of their power. Yet the centre of his doctrine persisted, all through the dark ages and the morbid superstitions of the mediæval world. The fervour of the Crusaders, the raptures of the early saints, kept alive with an unwholesome, unhappy but preservative devotion the lamp of love and hope, with its faith in the divinity of Man. The romance of the middle ages was the romance of Christ. From this sprang all their Art. The story of the San Greal, the story of Parsifal, the [illegible]

[illegible] greatest romance was to be loved by and united with Christ. [illegible]

[illegible] the worship of purity and heroism, and the conception of chivalrous love.

In early English literature the book which reveals perhaps most strikingly this Christian belief in man is Malory's *Morte d'Arthur.* In it is expressed that rare compound of mystic, religious and human passion which descended to Marlowe, and, only a little changed, to Shakespeare. A sense of a divine and merciful Father is never far absent from the heart of Lancelot and Guenevere. Adulterers though they are, their love for each other and their inherent nobility is represented by Mallory as so true and deep that their penitence and their passion can exist together, and in the sight of God they are sinful, but not shamed. In their unselfish devotion to each other, in their last great grief at the ruin they have brought, they embody the Christian conception of humanity: humanity blind and erring, but rendered unconquerable by death and sin, if it can truly feel both love and sorrow. In his reverence for the sheer depth of passion felt by his two great sinners, Malory reveals the genuine [illegible]

[illegible]

[1] In his essay on Romanticism and Classicism, Prof. Herford contrasts "passion glorified and dwelt on" by the romantic spirit with "passion restrained and somewhat [illegible]

At the last meeting of Lancelot and Guenevere, she a nun, enfeebled and broken-hearted yet upheld by the belief that "as sinful as she, are saints in heaven," Lancelot would have had her come with him into his own realm: but she refuses, and bids him take as she has done, to a holy life, and pray for both their souls. And so at last, after much lamentation they take their last farewell, and Lancelot becomes a priest. And after twelve months he knows from a vision that Guenevere is dying, and he hastens to her nunnery. He finds that she had died but half an hour before. "Then Sir Lancelot saw her visage, but he wept not greatly, but sighed. And so he did all the observance of that service himself, both the dirge at night, and on the morn he sang mass;" but afterwards "when she was put in the earth Sir Lancelot swooned, and lay long still, while the hermit came and awakened him and said: 'Ye be to blame for ye displease God with such manner of sorrow-making.' 'Truly,' said Sir Lancelot, 'I trust I do not displease God, for He knoweth mine intent. For my sorrow was not, nor is not, for any rejoicing of sin, but my sorrow may never have end. For when I remember of the beauty, and of the noblesse, that was both with the king and with her, so when I saw his corpse and her corpse so lie together, truly mine heart would not serve to sustain my careful body. Also when I remember me how by my default, mine orgule and my pride, that they were both laid full low, that were peerless that ever were living of Christian people, wit you well,' said Sir Lancelot, 'this remembered of their kindness and mine unkindness, sank so to my heart, that I might not sustain myself.'"

"Then Sir Lancelot never ate but little meat, nor drank till he was dead. For then he sickened more and more, and died, and dwined away. For ever more day and night he prayed, but sometime he slumbered a broken sleep. . . . So within six weeks after Sir Lancelot fell sick, and lay in his bed; and then he sent for the Bishop that there was hermit, and all his true fellows. Then Sir Lancelot said with dreary steven: 'Sir Bishop, I pray you give to me all my rites that longeth to Christian man.' 'It shall not need you,' said the hermit and all his fellows, 'it is but heaviness of your blood.' . . . 'My fair lords,' said Sir Lancelot, 'wit you well my careful body will into the earth, I have warning more than now I will say; therefore give me my rites.'" Then Sir Lancelot prayed his fellows to bear him to his castle at Joyous Gard. But before they could depart, and in the dead of night, the hermit had a vision of Sir Lancelot being borne up to heaven by "more

angels than I ever saw men in one day." And when they rose and went to his bedside "they found him stark dead, and he lay as he had smiled, and the sweetest savour about him that ever they felt."

So died Lancelot, a sinner.

It may seem hardly justifiable, for it is a far cry, to think in connexion with this passage of the death of Œdipus at Colonus. Yet there are some resemblances, and some very instructive differences in view of our definition of Romance. *Œdipus at Colonus* is perhaps the most moving of the extant Greek plays; it is certainly the most mystical, and the end of Œdipus is strangely like the mysterious passing related of some of the Christian heroes. Œdipus, like Lancelot, knows that his end is upon him, and urges those about him to prepare him for death. Œdipus, like Lancelot, is regarded by all as a guilty man—a man whose end is hardly likely to be blessed. Yet Lancelot is carried up to heaven by angels, and Œdipus is supernaturally and mysteriously rapt away. The lamenting daughters of Œdipus are rebuked, as Lancelot weeping for Guenevere had been rebuked, for indulging their grief, lest it should provoke divine anger. But, to turn now to the vast differences—they do not seek to defend their grief, as natural and right, they rather strive to accept the view of the chorus that they should be thankful that Œdipus has been allowed to die a holy death; his miserable life was but what is the lot of most men. To be sure, "Many were the sorrows that came to him without cause," but by his end his honour and glory and that of the gods has been established. To be sure, as the Greek audience knew, his sons will murder each other, [illegible] of sacred social prestige mattered far more to the Greek than to the Christian: this, from the point of view of the gods, is a man's sole legitimate aim; if a belated justice establishes the honour of Œdipus he has been fortunate. Lancelot sinned and was forgiven, because he loved much (not Guenevere only, but Arthur, and all his fellows); Œdipus has not sinned consciously, and is forgiven, not because he had a great heart, but because he had served the gods as a terrible example of the fate of men when they transgress the rigid laws of Zeus.

This may seem perhaps an unsympathetic account of the Greek play, which in many ways is more impressive and even in some ways more moving than anything in Christian literature. And yet the whole idea conveyed in it of God and man

is utterly barren of hope and love; and, though the language is splendid, it is in a sense barren also of splendour, for the human beings in it are too completely helpless. Œdipus, like Lear, is old, physically weak, exiled by his own offspring; but where Shakespeare makes Lear uplifted and irradiated by his love for Cordelia, so that we feel, better Cordelia dead, and Lear dead loving her, than both alive and Cordelia spurned, Sophocles allows his Œdipus almost with his last breath to curse his unhappy son—because Sophocles sees no glory in love, but only in justice.

Great passions, like other great things, make men forget that they are mortal. "Nothing great," says the chorus of the *Antigone*, "enters into the life of mortals without a curse." So deep is the gulf between Sophocles and the Romantic writers; above all between Sophocles and Shakespeare; for to Shakespeare that very greatness is man's one abiding consolation.

At the Renaissance the classical fairy-tale romance, with something of the stern classical philosophy, became united with the tender mystical mediæval spirit; and as might have been expected this union eventually created a very great age in literature—the Elizabethan. The melancholy mediæval world had now received with feverish delight the Greek ideal of joy in the present, of the fullness of life; so much so that this ideal seemed eventually almost to crowd out certain of the religious and philosophic ideals, both classical and Christian. But these continued always under the surface. Such men as Sidney, Raleigh and Spenser showed how the riotous splendour and adventure of the English Court might be combined with the reveries of the mediæval cloister and the philosophic dignity of the Platonic Academy. Marlowe—the reckless young gallant—in his greatest play *Faustus*, is still passionately concerned with the mediæval theme of the relation of man to his God. Shakespeare broke away from all religious doctrine: locked up the articles of his faith in his own heart, and poured into his works the inexhaustible fountain of his love of man and his belief in life. And where justice in human relations is the whole of the moral ideal to the Greek dramatists, the motive power in almost all Shakespeare's plays is love. The conflict for Hamlet is not like the conflict for Orestes, a struggle between two opposing supernatural commands representing two primitive social instincts: it is entirely a struggle of individual feelings. His love for his father, his mother and Ophelia is forced into opposition with Ophelia's love for him, for her father and her brother. No vote by ballot, however

symbolically it be interpreted, could save the wreck of Hamlet's emotional life; for he could only be saved by ceasing to love—and love is after all, his one refuge. It is a situation that could only have occurred to a Christian poet.

The tragic basis in *Julius Cæsar*, to take a less obvious example, is not ambition, but love: the moving-force-of-all that is serious in *Henry IV*, is love. "Et tu Brute" is the climax of Cæsar's tragedy, and also of Brutus's. Brutus is represented as a man much loved, "my heart doth joy," he says the moment before he stabs himself, "that yet in all my life, I found no man but he was true to me." And see how Portia and how Cassius love him! And he can love too—but not with sufficient faith. "Not that I loved Cæsar less, but that I loved Rome more"—it is sophistry, and in his soul he knows it: in betraying Cæsar he betrayed himself and ever afterwards there is a shadow of dishonesty, a weakness and uncertainty in his soul. *Thus* is Cæsar's ghost "Thy evil spirit Brutus." His soul will not counsel him faithfully; it is at cross purposes with him. Hence his advice is always wrong: first to the conspirators, when he will spare Antony, who is to be their death; this is a fault of tenderness, and an assassin cannot afford to indulge in tenderness; Brutus would be in two camps at once. Next when, again by an unwise

. Finally
insisting
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Cæsar is as it were resurrected by his own death, when he can say as he runs on his sword, "Cæsar, now be still: I killed not thee with half so good a will," only then is Brutus healed.

In *Henry IV* the secret influence throughout, slowly

reached in that scene in Part II where Henry has stolen the crown from the king's bed; and when he is discovered and upbraided and has pleaded his excuse, they are reconciled, and he receives it again from the king's dying hand. The king says:

> "O my son,
> God put it in thy mind to take it hence
> That thou might'st win the more thy father's love."

The feelings roused by this last meeting and first real communion of father and son are what really confirm Henry's earlier resolutions and make of him a new man and a great king.

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In *Henry IV* the secret influence *throughout slowly* [illegible] his love and honour. The climax of both parts of the play is reached in that scene in Part II where Henry has stolen the crown from the king's bed; and when he is discovered and upbraided and has pleaded his excuse, they are reconciled, and he receives it again from the king's dying hand. The king says:

"O my son,
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That thou might'st win the more thy father's love."

The feelings roused by this last *meeting* and first real communion of father and son are what really confirm Henry's earlier resolutions and make of him a new man and a great king.

Shakespeare's romance depends upon his view of the human spirit as a spirit eternally greater than Circumstance, with all that that suggests of possible divinity and immortality. In remembering that one is mortal there is no romance.

But the rest of the world could not dispense, as Shakespeare could, with its religious tenets. It could not combine, as he had done, love of the earthly and the spiritual kingdoms. Through Milton, whose spirit was ever vexed by some deep internal schism, through the hardening of religious thought, through Puritanism and Calvinism, themselves a natural reaction against the barbarities of the Catholic Church, the sense of the divinity of man was slowly lost—both in life and literature. It had survived the dark ages when the mass of men were hunted, housed and driven like beasts, but it could not survive the humiliating attitude of the Puritans to human life in general or the degrading manners of the Restoration. If the chivalrous Christianity of the middle ages had felt that all men were, at least potentially, aristocrats on the strength of their relationship to God, the Puritan attitude reduced all men, in God's honour, to one dead level of plebeian dust. And literature grovelled with them.

What was left of romance when the last light of the Elizabethan day had faded persisted shyly through the second dark ages, in a mystic, mediæval form. Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan, Traherne kept alive something of the old passionate faith in God: they even reproduced the old morbid, sensuous, religious ecstasy. But by the beginning of the eighteenth century even these voices seemed lost.

And so we come to a period when there was but little of either the classical sense of man's dignity and of God's justice, or the Christian sense of the holiness of human feeling and the love of God. The result of course was a low standard of conduct and a literature that spent itself on satire, and stuffed itself full of classical tags and postures to conceal the emptiness of its claim to exist at all. For man deprived of his classic toga and his Christian halo—or their equivalents—is merely a domestic animal whose habits should be chronicled by a benevolent naturalist: he is not a subject for poetry. And it was at this time that the habit arose of writing—and by no means always satirically—about human vices.[1] Shakespeare had used the very worst aspects of human character for dramatic, or for coarsely humorous purposes. With the growth of that

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"romantic notions" as are ridiculed in Lydia Languish; and glorified in a different form, in *Werther*: in a general enthusiasm for "antiques"—Gothic ruins, and primæval [illegible]

[illegible] Brown, who constructed Gothic ruins and laid out primitive glades in the gardens of the *nouveaux riches*. Mixed [illegible]

> "An inborn inextinguishable thirst
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there were Gray and Collins. But it is surely a mistake to see in such artificial founts the wellhead of a real Romantic Revival. Cowper's sermons on the desirability of a rural life, Thompson's exquisite stage effects, and if not Gray's moping owl, certainly Collins's meekest Eve, are little more than the flourishing of romantic ornaments by writers who, since they did not wholly believe in Man, could not really believe in Nature. Their romantic effect is mainly due to their eloquence, derived ultimately from two artists in the romantic style—Virgil and Spenser.

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... ridiculed in Lydia Languish; and glorified in a different form, in *Werther*: in a general enthusiasm for "antiques"—Gothic ruins, and primæval grottoes: in an hysterical clamour about the picturesque. And so came Walpole and Ossian, and Chatterton, who in spite of real genius chose to mask himself as an antique, and Capability Brown, who constructed Gothic ruins and laid out primitive glades in the gardens of the ...

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... Romantic Age.

But before any great change could come about, Poetry and Religion must be re-united: the rift must be healed between the sensuous and the mystical views of life. Above all the Christian faith in man must be re-established.

In 1757 Blake was born: and two years later Burns. Religion, which had made Cowper mad and prosaic, made Blake mad and poetical. By a fusion of religion and poetry, however strange, he expressed, what Burns's passionate lyrics implied, a renewed faith in human feeling. "For the tear is an intellectual thing, and a sigh is the sword of an Angel King"—it was a wonderful discovery for the eighteenth century. And yet both Blake and Burns were in many ways typical of a chaotic and sceptical age, and an aimless literature. Neither of them could achieve a steady and ordered art. If the pace of Burns's inspiration slowed down for a moment it was overtaken by an eighteenth century paralysis. And Blake often expressed himself, both in painting and writing, with a mixture of the formal, the grotesque, and the morbid which might seem almost irreconcilable with creative genius. He was a victim in his own way of the Gothic and pseudo-mediæval craze of the period.[1] Much of his work was as completely lacking in the simplicity and vitality of Christian Romance, as in the austere strength of the Ancients.

But Blake was a leader and an innovator for all that, and the true father of the Romantic Renaissance: "No man's fancy in that age," writes Swinburne, "flew so far and so high on so sure a wing. *No man's mind in that generation, dived so deep or gazed so long after the chance of human redemption.*"

In 1789 Blake published his *Songs of Innocence*; and the same year the storm of the French Revolution burst upon the parched and barren society of eighteenth century Europe. Chances of human redemption became an interesting topic to others than visionaries.

Less than ten years later Wordsworth and Coleridge produced their *Lyrical Ballads*, and the Romantic Age had begun.

The whole Romantic Age was nothing less than a Deluge in the intellectual world. Its angry waters burst the barriers of the preceding age to splinters and carried with them the wreckage of that age and débris from every past century. On the banks of the flood the great men stood and picked up fragments, each according to his taste.

The first spars to be washed down were naturally from the

[1] Blake was much influenced by Ossian.

[illegible]

true romantic material. Byron caught some genuine revolutionary enthusiasm, and a good deal of that kind of nature-worship which was really an eighteenth century product. Scott acquired plenty of mediæval fact, but very little of the spirit. He is a romantic in so far as his character drawing derives from Shakespeare; his humour and realism are as different from that of Fielding or Smollett as Jaques is from Thersites; as Keats says, "Scott endeavours to throw so interesting and romantic a colouring into common and low characters as to give them a touch of the sublime." But in the general sentiment and the handling of his themes he is soaked in the eighteenth century. Keats and Coleridge made a great haul—and a very mixed one. Coleridge formed his style on [illegible] great poetry out of the combination. Coleridge raked in German mysticism which eventually spoiled his mediæval mysticism. Keats drew in the [illegible] Greece, however his breast might heave "Under the weight of Classic Eloquence." He was certainly out of touch with the mediæval spirit. He was a solitary figure, gazing across the Deluge, and seeming to gather nothing from the wreckage that was driven past his feet. But gazing perhaps after chances of human redemption he took notice of Blake, of whom he said, "There is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott." Lamb also, poor romantic heart in its eighteenth century chains, double-locked with sorrows, took notice of Blake. The whole extent of floating debris and the whirling waters appealed to Lamb, rousing, like the "Motley Strand," "fullness of joy at so much life." And perhaps it was this fullness of joy, this omnivorous appetite of life, which Lamb shared with Shakespeare, though he so entirely lacked Shakespeare's moral digestion that could convert all things to nourish his faith in the good—perhaps it was this which led him to rescue those relics of the Elizabethan

Age, that but for him might have floated out of reach for ever.[1]

And so we come to Shelley. And it would be easier to say what Shelley did *not* pick out of the flood, than to reckon up what he did. In the course of a varied and adventurous expedition he picked samples of all that was afloat. He began by salving Mrs. Radcliffe, with quantities of pseudo-gothic and pseudo-romantic stucco. He acquired a prose style which was, to begin with, a positive caricature of the eighteenth century, so exaggerated was its pomp and formality. Deeply stirred by the philosophical and revolutionary whirlpools in the great stream, he then hurled himself in, and swam into the arms of Godwin: whence he was only rescued by the intervention of Peacock, who bore him off on the well-seasoned timber of Classicism. After that he gathered in almost the whole of the Classical inheritance: the mythical romance, the philosophy and the drama. He was by far the best Classic amongst the Romantic poets. He fished out also the eighteenth century Philosophers, French materialism, German mysticism, the Philosophy of the Revolution. He picked out science, classical and mediæval, and the science of his own day. He picked out Spenser and some later Elizabethans, and Milton, as Keats had done, but he parcelled them up with Rousseau and Lalla Rookh and Coleridge's Lay Sermon.[2] For he was not content with his own draught—which moreover he frequently diminished by hurling indignantly back into the flood some piece of the spoil that had begun to stink in his nostrils. He enriched himself largely from his fellows, particularly from Byron and Wordsworth. He acquainted himself with six languages, and studied as many different philosophies.

One other relic, buffeted about upon the waters, and having suffered a considerable sea-change, was a fragment of the old belief in Man—the perfectibility of man some of the reformers called it, or the equality of all men, the rights of man and of woman—it took various forms, political, philosophical and religious. But it seemed frequently not so much the old doctrine of the divinity of man as a new doctrine of the fallibility of God. This also Shelley salved; but he transformed it.

Such, briefly, were the constituents of the Romantic Age

[1] Lamb had a quite modern capacity for indiscriminately revelling in the human turmoil—"all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden; the very women of the town; the watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles . . . the very dirt and mud."

[2] See Shelley's Reading List for 1818.

in literature. And it confronted a very similar political maelstrom, though the elements of this were still more chaotic and unreconciled. Napoleon slept with Ossian under his pillow, it is said, showing how close was the kinship between the literary movement and the political, between the mock heroics of a Macpherson and the heroics, however audacious and wonderful still mock heroics, of the little Corporal. When both the new Anarchy and the new Tyranny had fizzled out, and no new world arisen, political life was left without faith and hope, deprived both of tradition and of the courage to innovate.

[illegible] the beautiful [illegible] umanity of [illegible] of England in the beginning of the nineteenth century. One does not easily conceive the Sonnet to the Elgin Marbles, the romance of Elizabeth Bennet, the immortal friendship of Walter Scott and Pet Marjorie, the Manchester Massacre, the Battle of Trafalgar, the Cato Street Conspiracy, the orgies of the Regent, as all belonging to the same decade.

[illegible] absorbing topic of the year was the scandal of Queen Caroline and the flunkey; finally, as a result of what the *Examiner* calls a general "change of feeling respecting her Majesty's chastity," she was acquitted, and the whole country ablaze with congratulatory fireworks. Many pages of the rest of the volume are occupied with an admirably written description of the hanging, before an immense crowd, of the five Cato Street Conspirators; an operation so clumsily carried out that it amounted to public torture. In another place we read of the execution of six persons, some for forgery, one for "sacrilege" in breaking open a church. This procession went to their death headed by the Sheriff chanting "I am the resurrection and the life." The difference between bigotry in Italy and bigotry in England would not seem at this time to have been great. About a year later Shelley was planning an attempt to rescue from the stake an Italian priest found guilty of sacrilege. His sentence was, however, commuted to the galleys for life.

Castlereagh,[1] Eldon, Sidmouth, and the Prince Regent,

[1] Castlereagh who "employed German mercenaries at the public flogging of English peasants"—See *The Skilled Labourer, 1760–1832*, by J. L. and B. Hammond.

watched the bed on which England lay so sick. And to these guardians the enormous majority of educated men resigned themselves without a protest, indeed with apparent servility. "The first gentleman of Europe!" exclaims Thackeray. "There is no stronger satire on the proud English society of that day, than that they admired George."

England in 1819.

"An old, mad, blind, despised and dying King,
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn—mud from a muddy spring;
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
But leech-like to their fainting country cling,
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow;
A people starved and stabbed in the untilled field,
An army, which liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield,—
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
A Senate,—Time's worst statute unrepealed;
Are graves, from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day."

Shelley chose hope. But most of his countrymen chose something more like despair.

An age such as was this one; an age of misshapen and discredited revolution, of combined fear of the future and reaction against the past, which yet remained on its constructive side apparently impotent; an age where the crudest atheism and religious persecution dwelt side by side, was in sore need of healing. Perhaps more in need of healing than any other in the world's history—for the disintegration was world-wide, and social institutions and religions, where they yet hung together, were fastened with the rottenest threads.

It has been claimed for the Romantic Movement that its keynote was "Humanity." In that case, since it was on so great a scale, it would have been an advance, as it needed to be, on all preceding movements, and its fruits would have been very different. That concern for human redemption which had exercised Blake, was undoubtedly widely felt by the thinkers, statesmen and poets of the time. But with very few exceptions it confined itself to humane or humanitarian activities—a very different matter. Many things were done, from beginning to end of the century, for man; but they were the same kind of things that were done for animals. The innumerable alleviations that were devised for the material conditions of life cleared the ground for a genuine religion of Humanity: but the religion has been wanting. The social

philosophers like Godwin evolved treatises about as well calculated to give men a new heart as a theory of pure mathematics: men like Hunt protested and suffered, but their vision was too narrow. Lamb laughed at the age; Hazlitt cursed at it; Byron, whose whole view of life and conduct savoured of the Restoration, became its idol, and proceeded to flout and flatter it by turns; Peacock satirized it with relish; Scott administered wholesome and pleasant anodynes; Coleridge, after the production of those few divinely intoxicating poems miraculously distilled out of his lymphatic soul, merely talked it into a delirium. Wordsworth proclaimed that "every great poet is a teacher," and soon ceased to be both, contenting himself when that little and rare nectar of his inspiration was exhausted, with administering potions no more stimulating than the "tea-pot pieties of Cowper."[1] Keats for a long time held himself aloof with a maiden fastidiousness; Shelley often allowed the spectacle of all this religious and political persecution to make him fanatical; and in fanaticism there is always [illegible]

[illegible] the men were [illegible] suffered all of them from a kind of divided purpose and lack of conviction, which undermined their strength; part and parcel of the duality of the age, with its conflict of scepticism and superstition, anarchy and tyranny, Royalist debauch and Puritan sterility. Goethe was conscious of inward division in his youth: though he believed himself later to have healed it (but if so he healed it in favour of the worse). "There are two different men in me," said Napoleon once, "the man of brains and the man of heart." Keats was in perpetual conflict with his own emotions, unable "[illegible] and sensation." [illegible] by his fellowmen. [illegible] reaction, conscious of a barrier between his mind and heart. Wordsworth relates how he was swayed by "A twofold frame of body and of mind," and how he struggled on with "lapse and hesitating choice, And backward wanderings along thorny ways"[2]—to lapse as it happened, unfortunately, in the end, to lose inspiration if not conviction. Peacock was always "two gentlemen in one"—a sentimentalist and a satirist, a Grecian and a gourmand, but he was happily divided, and did not attempt to interfere with divine purpose and join himself together. The pathetic charm of Lamb springs from the

[1] See Swinburne, *William Blake*, p. 5.
[2] See *The Prelude*, Bk. 14.

uncertainty of his spirit: he would never have laughed so long at life if he could have believed more in it. He never really made up his mind between hope and doubt. His religious faith, which was a matter of great moment to him in his youth, was of the Puritan type and consequently at variance with his sensuous nature. He did not hope much of man. And when Coleridge maintained that man was a "partaker of the Divine Nature," Lamb protested—"Man, a weak and ignorant thing . . . forgetting his nature, and hailing in himself the future god, must make the angels laugh." [1]

And that Lamb should have been a drunkard, Coleridge an opium eater, and Byron a libertine; that Wordsworth should have got so completely wearied out so early, and Keats have been so tremulous and hypersensitive that he at least laid himself open to the attacks of a mortal malady [2]—all such things are symptoms of the age. The destiny that drowned Shelley was merely in his case more unprovoked (except, indeed, that he provoked Nature!), it pursued the Romantics one and all.

Coleridge's life seems to sum up in itself the whole disaster of that "Romantic Triumph"—the marvellous dawn and the disappointing day. To Carlyle he seemed "a man of great and useless genius, a strange, not at all a great man." "An archangel a little damaged," said Lamb of his dearly loved friend when he met him again in 1816. Here was an ineffectual angel indeed. Ineffectual as friend, husband, father, poet, preacher and protégé, but sublimely effective as a talker. For he did in some measure atone for his sin by moralizing; what he had to forfeit was his poetry. "After my death," he writes in a pathetic and contrite letter, "I earnestly entreat that a full and unqualified narration of my wretchedness, and its guilty cause, may be made public, that at least some little good may be effected by the direful

[1] See Letter to Coleridge, October 24, 1796. Such a kind of angel was Lamb. In his sensitive soul and troubled existence he felt the need of hope without the power to grasp it. "I sometimes wish to introduce a religious turn of mind," he wrote to Coleridge, after recovering from a temporary insanity induced by disappointed love and inborn melancholy, "but habits are strong things and my religious fervours are confined, alas! to some fleeting moments of occasional solitary devotion." "Write as religious a letter as possible," he implores Coleridge after the terrible tragedy of Mary's madness and its consequences had overtaken their unhappy family. "The child Elia, that other me," the affectionate book-loving, punning Lamb, was in eternal opposition to the drunken Elia—"the changeling of five and forty."

[2] See for example, Keats to Fanny Keats, May 4, 1820: "Be careful to let no fretting injure your health as I have suffered it."

example!"[1] "Could the youth," cries Lamb in his *Confessions of a Drunkard,* "to whom the flavour of his first wine is delicious as the opening scenes of life or the entering upon some newly discovered paradise, look into my desolation." They were lovers of their fellows, all these Romantics, but those who had been weak in faith and had altered in act, were already

against evil, by talking and

d Comforts from the exercise
n, the Imagination and the
to those in Sickness, Adver-
peculative gloom, etc."—by

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who could write the *Ancient Mariner*![2]

"Few and unimportant would the errors of men be, if they did but know, first, what they themselves meant; and secondly, what the *words* mean by which they attempt to convey their meaning." This was how Shelley had talked at eighteen; Coleridge talked like this at over sixty. "A world of power

Coleridge suffered from "an utter impotence of the volition," and "a derangement in his intellectual and moral constitution,"[4] because, as with great earnestness he ridiculously confesses,[5] "the moral obligation is to me so very strong a stimulant, that, in nine cases out of ten, it acts as a narcotic"—the world that was thirsting for that healing draught which only its men of genius could devise, had to be satisfied in

the majority of his succes-
anatomy and its miseries.
He profoundly influenced

[1] But few men are allowed to make good by this method of self abasement. In life as in literature warnings against the bad will not do the work of demonstrations of the good. In 1807 De Quincey heard from Coleridge's own lips his confessions of the abuse of opium, and was warned by him against forming the habit "with a *peculiar emphasis of horror*." By 1821 De Quincey had himself got the length of publishing his *Confessions of an Opium Eater*.

[2] And compare Hunt

where.

[4] Coleridge on himself. Letter, April 25, 1814.

the men who, in the great armies of the speculative, were to fight the endless nineteenth century battles of Religion, Philosophy and Criticism.

"If they did but know," argued Coleridge. But to Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, when they had succeeded in freeing themselves from the snares and delusions of the philosophers and moralists, the problem appeared in a different light—" if they could but imagine and feel." For when we come to these three, we come to something very new—to the real Romantic movement, in fact. And it is a movement which has never been allowed its due influence. These three were not theorists only, but constructive poets—" Speaking not dreams but things oracular," not *sensitive beings merely*, but *creative souls*.[1] And most earnestly did they cherish the ambition of ministering to their unhappy times: and not only by offering a refuge, as the unreal romantics both of their own and the preceding age had done. The whole spirit and aim of their best work was widely different from that of the other literary men of their day, and from the tendencies of the age. Their attitude to Poetry was different and their attitude to Man, and had the nineteenth century as a whole found time in its turmoil to understand them more than superficially, Literature at any rate, if not life itself, might have developed differently. They reunited poetry and religion. "To be incapable of feeling poetry, in my sense of the word," wrote Wordsworth in a letter, " is to be without love of human nature and a reverence for God." They were filled with a faith—which was both great art and true Christianity—in the spirit of man. Their themes were:

> " Sorrow that is not sorrow, but delight;
> And miserable love that is not pain
> To hear of, for the glory that redounds
> Therefrom to human kind and what we are." [2]

Though Shelley and Wordsworth suffered at times from a kind of superficial intellectualism, all three poets completely saw through the intellectual fallacies of their time. "In a life without love," said Wordsworth, " there can be no thought: for we have no thought (save thoughts of pain) but as far as we have love and admiration."

It was the old simple Christian teaching, and to most of Wordsworth's critical and sophisticated readers, it, and his

[1] *Prelude*, Bk. XII, [2] *Ibid.*, Bk. XIII.

. . . mple, or as one . . . eenth century . . . l the habit, to truths as platitudes. But the unrealized cannot platitude. The kind of platitude that was then more was Godwin's kind—*addressed to the reason, and* . . . backed up with arguments. Wordsworth did not back up platitudes by anything—unless perchance poetry were something! . . . Godwi . . . only . . . formal proof why men should be good, and why they should . . .

and the gracious of every age to see, to think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." But how did he differ, it may be objected, from other writers . . . set themselves a didactic . . . poetry—or rather to the . . . eld, was man's chief glory,

> "This spiritual Love acts not nor can exist
> Without imagination."

Wordsworth's ambition was to write poetry that should fill the *imaginations of his countrymen with beautiful and true* ideals; not to analyse, but to create. He believed and hoped *infinitely in the soul of man. And Man was his theme, far* more than Nature. No really great poet is a poet purely of Nature. The eighteenth century was alive with poets of Nature; the twentieth century is dead with them. But mountains and lakes were to Wordsworth the scene where the romance of human and of heavenly love might be most deeply felt. And he liked to choose for his heroes beings that were great only by virtue of their emotional depth—meek men "unpractised in the strife of phrase":

[1] See a contemporary notice of *Alastor* in the *Monthly Review*.

"Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power,
The thought, the image and the silent joy:
Words are but under-agents in their souls;
When they are grasping with their greatest strength,
They do not breathe among them."

In theory at least he was no adherent of the talkers. And yet as soon as his inspiration failed him, his verse was little else than talk. In his determination to represent human feeling and experience in its purest form, without any external adornment, he landed himself, as in one way or another these later romantics were always doing, in an abstraction. He first made the mistake of supposing that the suffering and emotions of an old dalesman are *ipso facto* more stirring and instructive than those of a man in a high position—a king or any heroic public figure—and this is really an anti-social, and thus an inartistic, conception; secondly, he determined that the less subtle those emotions, and the balder the language in which they are expressed, the more effective will they be. These two things made drama impossible to him, deprived him, except when intense inspiration wrings his natural eloquence out of him, of the poet's best weapon, and caused him to turn his back on the whole heroic side of the romantic tradition.

Keats's vulnerable spot was of exactly the opposite kind. Man in general was a riddle to him; he cared only for the individual.[1] That at least was the fault of his early life and work—and he had so little else. His imagination revelled in everything that was aloof from simple, unadorned existence—passionate language, gorgeous scenes, chivalrous acts, ecstatic sensations; and in poetry he voiced only very seldom his sense and his own grim experience of the great sad silent struggle of humanity. Yet that was what the world needed to have expressed. The age demanded a second Shakespeare, who by his tolerance and his humour might ensnare the sceptics, uplift the despairing by his love of life, and make his faith effective with both. And perhaps the saddest thing of all to question, is whether Keats might not have achieved this, if only he had lived. For a great change was coming over him towards the end of his life; he was recovering from his egoistic isolation and introversion, and developing a manly and confident character. He had long cherished a desire for human service: "I am ambitious of doing the world some good," he writes in

[1] "I admire Human Nature; but I do not like *Men*"—Keats to Haydon, December 22, 1818. And to Reynolds, August 25, 1819, of mankind in general apart from his personal friends: "They are as much a dream to me as Milton's Hierarchies." And see other letters.

October, 1818; "if I should be spared, that may be the work of maturer years." And a few months earlier: "I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good to the world." During his last years he definitely aimed at Drama—the very thing that was needed, and that none of his contemporaries could achieve. Drama was the only form of literature that could have deeply influenced the England of 1820. It is national, democratic, for it appeals in some form to every being that has eyes and ears in his head; and because it needs living instruments to interpret it, it makes itself a part of the national life. An age nauseated with excellent but impotent theorizing might have learned from a great drama the remedy it needed in action and faith.

To what extent Keats was equipped for this great task we can see better, perhaps, from his letters than from his poems. In his letters he tells us that the whole of his poetical output was only a preparation for his higher ambitions; and in 1819 he writes: "I wish to diffuse the colouring of St. Agnes's Eve throughout a poem in which character and sentiment would be the figures to such drapery. Two or three such poems, if God should spare me . . . would be a famous *Gradus ad Parnassum altissimum*—I mean they would nerve me up to the writing of a few fine plays—my greatest ambition." To do this he needed especially the essentially romantic faith in man—Wordsworth's sense that the sorrows and joys of men are what most redound to their glory. And this Keats had very deeply, though the morbid side of his character delayed its expression in poetry. "I am certain of nothing," he writes on November 22, 1817, "but of the holiness of the Heart's affections, and the truth of Imagination. . . . I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love: they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty." "A man's life of any worth," he writes in November, 1819, "is a continual allegory, and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life—a life like the scriptures, figurative." An attitude of this kind is necessary to a dramatic poet; for what else is he doing than showing us that allegory and suggesting some understanding of its mystery? Absence of this conception is responsible for the modern play—a dreary succession of snapshots from low life, which mean far less, are less subtle and less moving than that life as we normally see it.

Keats could have fearlessly used heroic material, and grim and sordid material too, for he knew as well as Shelley did[1] how art could make "all disagreeables evaporate from their

[1] See Shelley on Byron, quoted above, p 182.

being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth."[1] And he knew that a similar alchemy is at work in the lives of men. "There is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify—so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism." No man could have written these things who did not understand, and in a way very different even from the inspired philosophizings of Coleridge, what poetry could do for the world.

But Keats died still a recluse; still a creature too sensitive to use human passions as a dramatist must use them; too sensitive to reap anything but misery from his own; still suffering from that "horrid Morbidity of Temperament"[2] which was a feature of the age and of almost all its men of genius.[3] And as Shelley lived only a year longer, and had failed, like Wordsworth and Keats, to make his message understood, the traditions of the "Romantic Age" were in due course founded upon its *Un*romantics, and upon qualities in Keats, Wordsworth, and Shelley which were not qualities, but defects—expressions of the false and not the true spirit.

And it is the very thing that they had all three feared. Keats and Shelley were both half-conscious of the fact that their poetic power was not really adequate to a task greater than any that has confronted a poet before. Sophocles and Shakespeare were carried forward on the shoulders of the multitude; our three Romantics had to push their way through it, and in a reverse direction—for very soon, at any rate, the tide had definitely set in favour of analysis and against a constructive art. The result was a flagging in their own self-confidence and a quite definite belief that such influence of theirs as had been felt would rapidly disappear—*for a time.* They had to look beyond their own generation, far beyond it, perhaps towards a new century:

> "Then, though (too weak to tread the ways of truth)
> This age fall back to old idolatry,
> Though men return to servitude as fast
> As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame,
> By nations sink together, we shall still
> Find solace—knowing what we have learnt to know,
> Rich in true happiness if allowed to be

---

[1] Keats to his brothers, December 22, 1817.
[2] To Haydon—May 11, 1817.
[3] Shelley wrote to Medwin about one of the latter's poems, in May, 1820: "I think the conclusion rather morbid. . . . But it is the spirit of the age, and we are all infected with it."

Faithful alike in forwarding a day
Of firmer trust, joint labourers in the work

Of their deliverance, surely yet to come."[1]

But it was not to old idolatry that the world turned: it was to a very new idol indeed, and a very tolerable one except when "the corruptible thing was named a god."[2] Science came to the rescue of a century that had failed and was utterly to fail in grasping the true significance of the message of its three really constructive poets. Science provided a form of progress, and the alternative to progress is decay. We have travelled a long way since 1820, and almost the whole of that progress has been due to science. But it has been mainly a material progress, and there is a growing doubt in the minds of many people whether on the whole we have advanced as far as we have walked. Literature should certainly prepare itself for the shock of recognizing one of these days before it in the sand its own departing footprints, and they will be the footprints not of Keats and Coleridge, but of Inchbald and Bloomfield.[3]

"Our fame," wrote Byron to Moore in February, 1818, "will be hurt by *admiration* and *imitation*. When I say *our*, I mean *all* (Lakers included). The next generation (from the quantity and facility of imitation) will tumble and break their necks off our Pegasus, who runs away with us; but we keep the *saddle* because we broke the rascal—and can ride. But though easy to mount, he is the devil to guide, and the next fellows must go back to the riding-school, and the manège, and learn to ride the 'great horse.'" Byron was wiser in this prophecy than he was aware. The next generation imitated with fervour—but it imitated all the wrong things. From Wordsworth it took the cult of the humdrum in poetical subject, and left on one side the whole of his real inspiration and his religion of the imagination. With the exception of a small portion of Arnold's poetry and criticism, the Words-worthian ideal left no issue while the poetical philosoph

[1] Address to Coleridge, *Prelude*, Bk. 14, *ad fin*. Compare the *Rev of Islam*, Canto ix, *ad fin*, for example:
"This is the Winter of the world . . . Behold! spring come
Though we must pass, who made
The promise of its birth . . ."

[2] See the passages on Idols in *The Wisdom of Solomon*.

[3] Mrs Inchbald wrote realistic plays and novels, between 1784 1805. Robert Bloomfield, during about the same period, wrote descriptive nature-poems.

of Shelley was eventually dismembered and disfigured both in matter and manner, and served up in the hotch-potch of Browning. As for Keats, who strove with himself to simplify and exalt his style, and to raise his work to higher aims and more austere effects, from him succeeding poets took the very weakness he was out to crush—his mere sensational æstheticism, and appetite of the eyes, without that faithful and fervent human ideal which in Keats's own work sounded even through his gush.

The poets of the Victorian era were true poets, in one sense or another, but not one was whole-hearted. They were maimed and bewildered by the conflicts of the age, and every one of them suffered in different forms from some "derangement of the moral constitution," like that which had effectively silenced the Muse of Coleridge. Tennyson was a good man, whose moral sense yet allowed him to reduce the impassioned and high-souled Guenevere of Malory, who, despite her sin, redounds to the glory of human kind and what we are, to that grovelling adulteress of the Idylls, jealous, shamefaced, and selfish. Swinburne had a strong moral understanding combined with Coleridge's "utter impotence of the volition." Arnold had high ideals, which flagged and faded for lack of a firm faith in which to root.

In almost all the English writers, since the voices of Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley were in their different ways silenced, the failure has been a failure of the true Romantic spirit—the belief in man. The Evolutionary theory has strengthened the idea that man's spiritual development is altogether at the mercy of material progress. Once more, as in the religions of a savage state, man is mocked; mocked by such doctrines as these—that his ideal can but measure the present development of his faculties;[1] that he must, in fact, wait on evolution to be saved; or that the difference between good and evil is merely relative. We are almost back to the Epicurean teaching that right and wrong are only a social convention, and change like other fashions. "We should look at these agreeable and disagreeable qualities of our humanity humbly alike," writes Thackeray in *Esmond*. "They are consequent and natural, and our kindness and meanness both manly." No man would ever make money out of a business conducted with so little *parti-pris*!

And from these views have sprung the further idea that men cannot really be expected to distinguish between good and evil; and in literature our sympathies are asked not for the

[1] See Brailsford: *Shelley, Godwin, and their Circle*, p. 250.

man who is with difficulty overcome by a powerful tem- but for one who succumbs by sheer poverty of inte. feeling. The human being who does not usually ... difference between good and bad is really either a beast . idiot. And thus we have the two motives—the "idiot" so popular in Russia,[1] and the motif favoured in Germany and France and Scandinavia of the *bête humaine.*

And yet even now perhaps the Romantic spirit, dead in literature and thought, breathes faintly in a different sphere. The original movement arose in connexion with a political upheaval; it is in social and political ideals that it has feebly and strugglingly persisted. The paralysis which has overtaken an age seeking formal proof in everything to the point of losing conviction, has been occasionally and almost miraculously shaken off in concerted national action. Under a mass of débris the Romantic spirit stirs in an institution like that of the League of Nations; and all that is best in the League was created by men some of whom were in the direct tradition of the Romantic Revolution. It was a tradition built up, both imaginatively and practically, by men who were at once aristocrats, democrats, and poets. It was represented in Germany by Goethe, in France by Mirabeau; in England by Byron, Shelley, and Landor. it passed on to Swinburne. And the two most noble and romantic figures of the century, Garibaldi and Mazzini, were fed and clothed with it.

If Shelley felt after talking about poetry with Byron that his system of criticism was only "fit for the production of mediocrity," it was very likely not because of Byron's literary views so much as because of his fundamental lack of faith in the nobler possibilities of human nature—a lack which is inconsistent with any really great human achievement. Spiritual mediocrity is the inevitable outcome of the abandonment of a courageous idealism. When Mazzini, a lonely leader addressing the new-born Roman republic, helpless before a hostile world and with the French army at its gates, said to that doomed assembly, "Here in Rome we may not be mediocrities," he was claiming what the Romantic—be he poet, statesman, or preacher—always claims for Man, that he is capable of the highest. "He that believeth in me," said the Son of Man, "the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do" On some such ... depends everything in human life that can be called rom...

[1] And begun, alas, by our Romantics! *The Idiot* was the n... the novel Clare Clairmont started during Shelley's and Mary's ... ...; and Wordsworth had a distinct penchant for the feeble-...

But this faith must be induced—for faith, as Shelley said, is not voluntary, it is a passion, and, most of all, it must be justified. A scientific age like the present is suspicious of the Romantic attitude; it does not ask of its art that it should nourish a Faith in Man; and it manifestly does not believe that any art can be instrumental in justifying that faith. It might do well to set aside the Victorian interpretation of the Romantic Age, and study again in a new spirit not only the poetical achievement, but the personal beliefs, the hard-fought battles and artistic aims of Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley.

CHAPTER X

SHELLEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND POETRY

"They only who build on Ideas build for Eternity."
Emerson.

WE have seen that Shelley was in his life an earnest and very active man, useful to large numbers of ... beneficent

improve the world: he tried to ... actively supporting causes ... he tried to do it by actively supporting ... when he ... which he ... e roman- ... deliberately turned ... Shelley

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"They only who build on Ideas build for Eternity."
Em[illegible]

We have seen that Shelley was in his life an [illegible] and very active man, useful to [illegible]

[illegible]

improve the world: he tried to do this by reasoning against superstition; he tried to do it by actively supporting causes of political freedom; at a comparatively mature age, when he was more than ever aware of the evils of the times in which he lived, he deliberately turned to poetry. Much of the romanticism of his contemporaries was a refuge from reality. Shelley sought poetry with the most serious purpose.[1]

[illegible] view o[illegible] stand [illegible] only indirectly answered. For it is possible to argue that a good man and a true poet may produce beautiful and moving poetry which is yet neither helpful nor relevant to life. "The substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character," says Arnold, "from possessing in an eminent degree truth and seriousness." In the philosophy underlying

[1] He speaks in his letters of future poetical schemes as great and [illegible] poetry.

reverent and moving references to Jesus Christ in the poems. Peacock tells us Shelley even once went so far as to propose to become a clergyman. "What," said Peacock, "to become a clergyman with your ideas of the faith?" "Assent to th supernatural part of it," he said, "is merely technical. O the moral doctrines of Christianity I am a more decided discipl than many of its most ostentatious professors."

From all this it might appear that he had no constant faitl of any kind. But these early theories and arguments wer merely the intellectual foam of his mind. His real philosoph

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the passionate admiring nature of his early friendships, and th many mistakes he made in judging character. Hence also hi mistakes in judging the value of works of art or philosophy. H was ready to acclaim as a prophet almost any writer who cham pioned some form of this belief. He rediscovered it in what

with any of the others, and two of the ideas which recur mos frequently in his prose and poetry are essentially Platonism— though they were probably not derived from Plato, whor Shelley

days.

an unre

all-pervading Spirit of Reality dwelling behind this painte veil of life. But the likeness between Shelley and Plato wa deeper than this: there is a profound resemblance in thei whole outlook. Shelley is a Plato spoiled, or Plato *réuss* according as one values most philosophy or poetry. Bot were inspired almost entirely by what Jowett calls "Th passion of the idea"; both

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future and the ideal,

not *unrealizable*) more than for the actual. Both not onl

taught, but vividly felt that between the shadow life on earth and the immortal world of ideas there was only a mist of ignorance or error which any man might dispel at any time—if he had sufficient wisdom, according to Plato, and, according to Shelley, sufficient love. For both the possible was the foundation of the actual, and the abstract perfection of the human character a reflexion from the actual perfection of the divine.[1]

But it was not till after 1816 that Shelley really drank deep at the fountains of Plato. During his period of hopeless rationalism, when he had reduced himself to maintaining that humanity was godless, fate-bound, and doomed to annihilation, he still preserved his faith in man; but he turned it to wholly practical aims, and concentrated his ardour on politics rather than on philosophy. He nourished himself upon his hope of man's perfectibility. He early tried in vain to win Hogg to it. He wrote to Miss Hitchener: "Ridicule perfection as impossible. Do more: prove it by arguments which are irresistible. Let the defender of perfection acknowledge their cogency. Still, a strenuous tendency towards this principle, however unattainable, cannot be considered wrong." Political philosophy and wild political schemes became for a time the only outlet for his ardent idealism, when once he had shut the door against his native instincts of poetry and imagination. But the disillusionments that he suffered in these first crude efforts after the millennium were just what he needed to deepen and chasten his inner faith. Belief in man is only a broken reed—is, indeed, as Lamb said, "a thing to make the angels laugh," until it has been seasoned even with a kind of misanthropy and braced with despair. By 1814, with his hopes of man considerably lowered, Shelley had realized that the world would be still unfit for the millennium even were there no priests and kings. But he was quite unembittered, and held as confidently as ever to the faith expressed in *Queen Mab*, "yet every heart contains perfection's germ." And he began to build up for himself a philosophy, both mystical and practical, which should be consistent with all that that faith implies.

Already in *Queen Mab* he had shown in sudden moments of imaginative insight that he understood more of "ambiguous man" than could be reconciled with his picture of the puppet

[1] Shelley's *Essay on Christianity*. "Thus God is a model through which the excellence of man is to be estimated, whilst the abstract perfection of the human character is the type of the actual perfection of the divine."

tyrant and the puppet slave dancing round their everlasting vicious circle at the bidding of "Necessity, thou Mother of the World."

> "Ambiguous man—he that can know
> More misery and dream more joy than all."

Ambiguous and suffering, because within the mortal man is caged the divine.

> "For birth but wakes the spirit to the sense
> Of outward shows, whose unexperienced shape
> New modes of passion to its frame may lend;
> Life is its state of action."

This is very near to the philosophy of Keats, who says that circumstances are the touchstones and provings of the human heart, fortifiers and alterers of man's nature; and asks: "What is his altered nature but his soul? And what was his soul before it came into the world, and had these provings and alterations and perfectionings? An intelligence without Identity. And how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart? And how is the Heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances?"[1]

Amongst Shelley's metaphysical essays and fragments, the dates of which are very uncertain, but they probably mostly belong to his time at Marlow, is a very interesting fragment *On Life*. Here we read:

"The shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals, and their violent dogmatism

destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution."

This passage expresses very completely his mature view of the nature of man and the problem of immortality. In his prose writings he does not commit himself to a definite belief in the soul's survival,[2] and at the end of his life, in the notes to

[1] Letter of April 28, 1819

[2] The fragment entitled *On a Future State*, argues against any such belief; but Mary Shelley suggests that only the first stages of the argument had been written. In any case, its date is uncertain, and it seems entirely in Shelley's youthful disputatious vein.

Hellas, merely repeats his conviction that until better arguments can be produced than sophisms which disgrace the cause, man's passionate desire for immortality "must remain the strongest and the only presumption that eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being." Except in his poetry, he contents himself with anticipating for man a heaven on earth.

As his faith in the possibility of a millennium and in the divine nature of man grew deeper and more spiritual, he ceased to use the word "God" as a pure term of abuse. One might almost suggest that he saw the difficulty of claiming divinity for man and not allowing a certain measure of divinity to God. But in actual fact he had never been an atheist. The reasons for his atheistical pose were practical, as we shall see when we come to consider the practical side of his philosophy. There was also a considerable element in it of that resentment of sheer power which Shelley had to excess, but with which we are all a little in sympathy. But, philosophically, he would never accept the idea of an all-powerful, self-sufficient, personal God. He felt that "where indefiniteness ends, idolatry and anthropomorphism begin." Yet his original conceptions were so very indefinite, so completely pantheistic, that they were, in the philosopher's phrase, "a polite way of bowing God out." God is "a synonym," he tells us in June, 1811, "for the existing power of existence." In a note to *Queen Mab* he is ready to admit "a pervading spirit coeternal with the universe." But between this and the conceptions embodied in his poems after 1814 there is a big gulf. In 1816 the spirit invoked in the two poems written in Switzerland is definitely a *moral* power, as it is in the *Essay on Christianity*. Here we read: "God was contemplated by Jesus Christ as every poet and every philosopher must have contemplated that mysterious principle. He considered that venerable word to express the overruling Spirit of the collective energy of the moral and material world. . . . There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will. . . . Our most imperial and stupendous qualities—those on which the majesty and the power of humanity is erected . . . are . . . the passive slaves of some higher and more omnipotent Power. This Power is God." In later writings he definitely speaks of God as directing human life:

"All rose to do the task He set to each
Who shaped us to His ends and not our own."[1]

When Shelley's resurrected imaginatio
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c ... ymous with Selfish
I ... of man imperfect not from weakness or from lack of vision, but, inconsistently enough, from the effects of human tyranny. But a more subtle conception can be found even here when Philosophy for a moment take
Propaganda.
element" in t

> "A world ... ves and hatreds; these beget
> Evil and good; hence truth and falsehood spring;
> Hence will, and thought, and action, all the germs
> Of pain or pleasure, sympathy or hate,
> That variegate the eternal universe.
> Soul is not more polluted than the beams
> Of heaven's pure orb, ere round their rapid lines
> The taint of earth-born atmospheres arise."

On the face of it this would appear to be a wholly inconsistent passage—"Soul is all. Soul begets evil and good. Soul is, by nature ... me light, however, from a
Here we read: "We are
... necessity, that there
not evil in the
we apply
being." S ... that the soul in its earthly phase is like a thing reflected in a distorted mirror, and its manifestations are like the motions of a sleep-walker. The intentions of the soul, in fact, are always good; evil is due to its inexperience in the world of time; in eternity it ceases to be inexperienced.

From all

J ... an organic
c ... the world is suffering, and which can only be cured by a miracle"? These two statements, however, though perverse enough in their context, are not altogether untrue. The first view of evil belongs to Shelley's mystical philosophy, the second to his practical one. His metaphysical and his moral and political theories continued to develop on more or less parallel lines—only in his poetry are they united.

The practical side of his faith in the soul of man was, as

the practical side of his vague and imaginative Deism was a violent opposition to the orthodox conceptions of God. He felt that a religion which is too dogmatic about a man's duty prevents him from developing his own sense of that duty. He would not accept that "the will of God is the source or criterion of morality." [1] He objected to the Church's teaching with regard to rewards and punishment, whereby the purity of motive was destroyed. "If . . . eternal torture or happiness will ensue as the consequence of certain actions, we should be no nearer the possession of a standard to determine what actions were right and wrong." With the real teaching of Christ he was in complete agreement, as his *Essay on Christianity* shows. But the religion of his own day seemed to him only to hold up a painful and immoral picture of deity, and to retard the growth of "morality, the great means and end of man." [2]

Some of those who have been bitter against Shelley as a man without a respect for morals would have been surprised to discover that he actually spoke of morality as the means and end of man. It is quite true that his own moral code was extremely simple—perhaps too simple for the complicated chaos of modern civilization [3]—but it was based upon the Christian belief in the power of love and mercy. "The distinction between justice and mercy was first invented in the Courts of Tyranny," he writes in the *Essay on Christianity*; and in his *Defence of Poetry*, "The great secret of morals is love." His one commandment was, "Be kind"; and though he himself led a simple and ascetic life, and believed that men "should satisfy bodily wants at the cheapest rate, and expend the remaining energies of their nature in the attainment of virtue and knowledge," he had yet no unrelenting condemnation for any form of self-indulgence which was not selfish or cruel. He knew that the individual must pay dearly for living riotously and grossly.

> "Leave the self-contempt implanted
> In young spirits, sense-enchanted,
> Misery's yet unkindled fuel,"

cry the Furies of *Prometheus Unbound*. And in his review of Hogg's novel he rebukes him most earnestly for implying that any man can indulge appetites which are merely sensual

[1] See letter to Lord Ellenborough.
[2] For this expression see fragment entitled *The Revival of Learning*.
[3] In the original preface to the *Revolt of Islam* we read: "It is because there is so great a multitude of artificial vices that there are so few real virtues."

without damaging his higher nature. But what he cries out against most bitterly is "the cold-blooded and malignant selfishness of sensuality." "Cruelty, envy, revenge, avarice," were to him among the passions purely evil, because they sprang from hardness of heart; and the only real sin was wilfully to injure a fellow-creature.[1]

Such, then, briefly was Shelley's "view of life." As a poeti- [illegible]

dormant and unreal character of earthly life. As a reformer [illegible] ments which made for greater men and women; he hated [illegible] ranny of a narrow and dog- [illegible] ally opposed to violent and sanguinary upheavals, until every other weapon had been tried in vain.

All very well, may be the retort, but what does he do with these opinions? What is the connexion between these sensible and manly doctrines and the vague yearnings and "abstractions" that fill his poems—the everlasting subject-matter of unsatisfied desire and vanishing dream? Here was a man whom you represent as deeply sensitive to the sorrows of the world, and who lived in an age of great human suffering and struggle, yet he produced little but musical complaint and elusive rainbow heavens. "Have restless hearts one throb the less?"

We can only reply that Shelley hoped they would have; and his hope was based on his own peculiar and unshakable faith in the effect of Poetry on man's diviner nature. He regarded himself as the interpreter of a heavenly and consoling message.

"Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
 The trumpet of a prophecy. . . . !"

He turned to poetry as to an intensely practical thing—indeed, the most practical thing in the world. It was the best answer

[1] Writing to Mary of the Hoppner scandal, he laments with much feeling that people who had seen and known him should believe him capable, not only of "having fallen into a great error, as would have been the living with Claire as my mistress," but of having committed "such unutterable crimes as destroying or abandoning a child, and that my own!"

he knew to the eternal cry: "What shall we do to be saved?" It was to him the chiefest of those miracles which might cure the organic disease.[1] And his own method in poetry was completely consistent with his ideas of its healing and sustaining powers.

He looked upon the groaning earth—upon revolution, famine, greed, persecution, and widespread despair—and he clung, as he told Byron, "to moral and political hope like a drowner to a plank." [2] He recognized that there is no man long happy—no, not one; that human life is a repeated failure; yet he still believed man capable of the highest virtue and happiness. What was obviously wanted was simply an effort of the will. But how could the will be moved? Long before he wrote the *Defence of Poetry* he had seen that it was not "for want of admirable doctrines that men hate and despise and censure and deceive and subjugate one another." He could mock with the moral fervour of Wordsworth against the mere moralist.

> "'Resolve,' the haughty Moralist would say,
> This single act is all that we demand!
> Alas! such wisdom bids a creature fly
> Whose very sorrow is that time hath shorn
> His natural wings."[3]

Julian says to Maddalo:

> "'It is our will
> That thus enchains us to permitted ill—
> We might be otherwise—we might be all
> We dream of, happy, high, majestical.
> Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek
> But in our mind? and if we were not weak
> Should we be less in deed than in desire?'
> 'Ay, if we were not weak—and we aspire
> How vainly to be strong!' said Maddalo:
> 'You talk Utopia.' 'It remains to know,'
> I then rejoined, 'and those who try may find
> How strong the chains are which our spirit bind;
> Brittle perchance as straw.'"

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[1] "Imagination! which from earth and sky
And from the depths of human fantasy
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors fills
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
Of its reverberated lightning."

[2] See Murray's *Lord Byron's Correspondence*, Letter of May 4, 1821.

[3] *The Excursion*, Bk. 4.

Neither could wisdom and knowledge[1]—no, not even the knowledge that virtue is to our own best interest—stir the
himself
ed. He
wrote of his own age, what might well be written of ours: "We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. . . . The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world has . . . proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave." And the reason for all this seemed to Shelley, that we have developed at the expense of the *imagination*, which is "the great instrument of moral good." "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life." "Poetry[2] strengthens the faculty, which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise
ts after
us both
closely
connected. In living, Shelley had written, "we lose the apprehension of life."[3] The business of poetry is to be for ever reminding us how poignant a thing life is, how mysterious, how brief, how momentous. "It compels us to feel that which we perceive"—and thus by making the sympathies alert it begins to act upon the will. "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another, and many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own." But first it has more to do. It must purify and stimulate all noble passions and aspirations;[4] it must express ideals so beautiful that

[1] Cf. Sidney, in his *Apologie for Poetrie*: "Our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it."

[2] By poetry Shelley often means, as he himself admits, all forms of the expression of the imagination, and in this he is following both Plato and Sidney. Plato, indeed, goes much further than Shelley, and says: "Poetry . . . is a general name signifying every cause whereby anything proceeds from that which is not into that which is; so that the exercise of any inventive art is poetry."—Symposium 205

[3] Fragment *On Life*.

[4] "Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion" (Preface to the *Cenci*).

desire for these shall become the most enduring of all desires. And is not *desire*, after all, the only thing that can effectively set the will in action?[1] And therefore Shelley is doing nothing inconsistent with his own austere view of the moral purpose of poetry when he dwells over and over again on the theme of infinitely desired and elusive Beauty.

Writing to Miss Hitchener in 1812, when he was suffering deeply at Hogg's betrayal of him, he says: "You say he mistook the love of virtue for the practice. I think that you have endeavoured to separate cause and effect. No cause do I esteem so indissolubly annexed to its effect as the *real sincere* love of virtue to the disinterested practice of its dictates." Shelley, like Wordsworth, wished to make virtue for its own sake loved; but he did not choose the more dramatic method, which proceeds by contrasting good with evil. He shrank from the portrayal of moral deformity; that is why he never really liked his own play of the *Cenci*. He says of this in a letter to Leigh Hunt: "I confess I did not expect it to be so successful with you, or with anyone, although it was written with a certain view to popularity, a view to which I sacrificed my own peculiar notions in a certain sort, by treating of any subject, the basis of which is moral error." In consequence he failed to portray a villain—for Cenci is an infernal machine (so too, perhaps, is Iago). He did not even like to mingle evil and good in a single character. Because he felt so strongly that "error cannot in any of its shapes be good—I cannot conceive the possibility," he seems to have feared "to confound the good and evil principle" if he exhibited them in the same character. In any case, he rarely did so successfully, and his dramatic and semi-dramatic poëms as a whole lack shade.[2] Though he did not personally care to draw evil characters, he could endure them in other writers, provided a sense of the fundamental dignity of human nature were not wanting. He rebuked Byron repeatedly on the ground that his "bitter mockery of our common nature" was not worthy of his genius. And he was, of course, quite right.

[1] Cf. Sidney again (*Apologie*): "The Philosopher showeth you the way, he informeth you of the particularities, as well of the tediousness of the way, as of the pleasant lodging you shall have when your journey is ended, as of the many by-turnings that may divert you from your way. But this is to no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive, studious painfulness, which constant desire, whosoever hath in him, hath already passed half the hardness of the way, and therefore is beholding to the Philosopher but for the other half."

[2] *Charles I* and *Hellas*, had they been worked out, might have been exceptions.

Byron mocked because he had neither the heart nor imagination for genuine reverence or true compassion. And was therefore all in vain that Shelley implored him to use poetical powers in the cause of virtue, exhorting him: "Is there nothing in the hope of being the parent of greatness and of goodness which is destined, perhaps, to expand indefinitely?"[1]

With [illegible] tell us is so vast—and to turn them to constructive and creative purpose. He never ceases to hold up before our eyes the "eternal possibility." "An eternal possibility has no material power," say the critics.[2] But is there any power in the world to compare with it? Unless we are prepared to regard the evolution of life exactly as Lucretius regarded it—as the fortuitous assembling and dispersal of grains of dust in chaos—[illegible] imagining forth its objects, is that faculty of human nature on which every gradation of its progress, nay, every, the minutest, change depends."[3] And even in a strictly practical sphere, if we deny to the human being his eternal possibility of becoming godlike, or to the race theirs of becoming sublimely happy, we take the heart out of all moral and social effort. Therefore Shelley pictures for us heavens upon earth, though he knew they might take æons to attain, and heavens beyond the grave, though he sometimes doubted whether there were anything beyond; ideal human character, though he suffered as much as most of us from the persistent imperfections of his neighbours and himself; and nature, penetrated by a divine spirit, found, only to be lost again.

And are these themes, as he treats them, really "abstract"

[1] *Byron's Correspondence*, letter of September 29, 1816.
[2] Santayana: Essay on Shelley in *Winds of Doctrine*.
[3] Shelley's *Speculations on Morals—Benevolence*.

in any proper sense of the word? The delight in drawing Utopias was at its height in the gloriously practical sixteenth century. Sir Thomas More dreamed of achieving the millennium by a Reform of the Laws; Bacon prophesied it as a result of the increase of Scientific Knowledge. Shelley believed at one time in both these methods, but his imagination soon told him that they were too shallow and mechanical. He insists that man must reform his own heart, and enter into some new and far deeper relationship with Truth and Beauty, and all the rest shall be added thereto; he must conquer first himself, and then the elements.

"Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,
Whose nature is its own divine control

. . . .

All things confess his strength. Through the cold mass
Of marble and of colour his dreams pass.

. . . .

The lightning is his slave; heaven's utmost deep
Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep
They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on!
The tempest is his steed, he strides the air;
And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,
Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none."

In a heaven of this kind he firmly and fervently believed. As for his dreams of an immortal life, he felt that they were at the least calculated to help and encourage. He did not present them as a refuge for shallow optimism. Death remained to him, as it must to every thoughtful and sensitive mind, a "subject of inexhaustible melancholy," since at the best it interposes a mysterious and terrible chasm between man and his hope. "Too happy earth," he cries in one of the last of his poems,

"over thy face shall creep
The wakening vernal airs, until thou leaping
From unremembered dreams shalt see
No death divide thy immortality."

In a note to the first chorus of *Hellas* he writes: "As it is the province of the poet to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity, let him be permitted to have conjectured the condition of that futurity towards which we are all impelled by an inextinguishable thirst for immortality." His conceptions of a future state are based upon the same moral ideas as those of a happier life on Earth—love and pursuit of virtue. The soul cannot survive, he felt, unless it have the desire to live, and the power to seize and retain all

that is beautiful and good.[1] The unhappy victims of the Unreal, which men call Life, in the *Triumph of Life*, fall weary and faint by the wayside:

> "Those soonest from whose forms most shadows passed,
> And least of strength and beauty did abide."

Adonais becomes one with the true Life and Beauty he had ever sought:

> "He is secure, and now can never mourn
> A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;
> Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
> With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn."

Shelley's paradises, both earthly and heavenly, are of such [illegible] t [illegible] t [illegible] t [illegible] mortal.

> "Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy
> And arts though unimagined yet to be."

There is the elemental Elysium of the *Witch of Atlas*, and the island Eden of *Epipsychidion*; there is the starry heaven where the soul of Adonais basks in that light whose smile kindles the universe; there is the swift flight from shape to shape of glorious being which makes up eternity for the souls in *Hellas*; there is the sun-illumined, God-encompassed solitude among the Euganean Hills, there is the commonwealth of love that follows it; there is the immeasurable sky, where the Cloud, soulless, or very soul itself, as the reader may choose, passes through its joyous transformations; there is that world far from ours

> "Where music and moonlight and feeling
> Are one."

These [illegible] from [illegible] hims[illegible] numb[illegible] of his generation numbered theirs by opium, or cynicism, or metaphysics. They had the contrary effect—they kept him always alive to a sense of disappointment. They are

[1] Cf. Matthew Arnold's sonnet, *Immortality*.

the efforts of a spirit penetrated with the beauty and sorrow of life to reach out into the Future and Unknown after hope and faith.

The same is true of his attempts to describe the ideal human being. It is a fact that his success is only partial; he makes not a complete human character, but something more than a virtuous abstraction. In several instances he does succeed in making a blameless hero, if not "credible by human belief," at least "lovable by human infirmity."[1] The poet of *Alastor* is strangely moving on his devoted search for the Spirit of Perfection, through wilderness and whirlpool and mountain fastness to his death; Prometheus, hoping all things and enduring all things, defiant and compassionate, makes an impression which is ineffaceable. And how wonderfully attractive are those sketches of actual people—Sophia, Constantia, Emilia, Jane—whose charms Shelley with far "more than truth expressed." In so far as he fails, it is not because his aim is too blatantly didactic. In his mature opinion, didactic poetry was useless, and a poet who embodied his own conceptions of right and wrong was merely assuming the inferior office of an interpreter of virtue, instead of participating in its cause.[2] Still less was his failure due to any narrow or "abstract" conception of moral good. Shelley thought of morals as the source of the "vitality of actions." Virtue he felt to be the expression of life, a natural and joyous expression; and evil the result of torpor.[3] "Selfishness," he says, "is the portion of . . . those whom toil or evil occupations have blunted or rendered torpid."[4] And again: "The end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure; and therefore it is corruption; it begins at the imagination and the intellect as at the core, and distributes itself thence as a paralysing venom through the affections into the very appetites, until all become a torpid mass in which hardly sense survives."

[1] *Shakespeare*, by A. C. Swinburne. "The faultless and ideal figure of Marcus Brutus, as painted by William Shakespeare, shines out for all time in serene and superb disproof of the doubtless reasonable as well as plausible belief that the perfect heroism of perfect humanity must needs be unattractive, if not repellent, to the instinctive sense or apprehension of average and inferior mankind. No lesser poet has ever succeeded—in other words, no other poet will ever succeed—in making a blameless hero at once credible by human belief and lovable by human infirmity."

[2] See *Defence of Poetry*.

[3] See, for instance, his description of "lust" as "passionless" in the *Revolt of Islam*.

[4] *Speculations on Morals*.

eemed to him "a painted veil" only because man re-ed so faintly and so dully to the vitalizing influence of ess. He must be made to desire and hope far more. what a man is capable of desiring is, after all, a better ure of his spiritual stature than what, in the face of rary circumstance, he may happen to achieve. Yet in mpting to draw ideal human virtue Shelley knew quite well he ran the risk of making, as he did, figures that were outlines. He says in his *Defence of Poetry*: "Few poets he higher class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their ceptions in its naked truth and splendour; and it is doubt-whether the alloys of costume, habit, etc., be not necessary temper this planetary music for mortal ears." And in the eface to *Islam* he makes this noble apology: "If the lofty ssions with which it has been my scope to distinguish this ory, shall not excite in the reader a generous impulse, an rdent thirst for excellence, an interest profound and strong, uch as belongs to no meaner desires—let not the failure be mputed to a natural unfitness for human sympathy in these sublime and animating themes. It is the business of the Poet to communicate to others the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings, in the vivid presence of which, within his own mind, consists at once his inspiration and his reward."

He had no need to temper his planetary music when he was describing Nature and the eternal spirit of Beauty which he found there. Vast and majestic outlines are what he wanted: he uses detail with great skill and beauty, but the most powerful and original of his effects are of towering clouds, immense panoramas of land and sea, boundless sky, mighty and mysterious winds. And again the unearthly grandeur in these scenes is not the unearthliness of vagueness and mirage. Behind all his ætherial creations lies a great wealth of knowledge and thought and study—far more than is realized by the casual reader. His poetry is rich in allusion to other literature; his profound enthusiasm for Ancient Greece nourishes it within, and clothes it without. Wide reading in many modern literatures, in philosophy, in politics, and in science, is the foundation upon which the skiey structure rests. His descriptions of Nature are controlled by a deeply scientific instinct. Science he held the "Sister of Poetry", and it contributed nothing to his imagination inconsistent with his mystical world of ideas. He seems even to anticipate poetically some part of our modern scientific knowledge. Could he actually have possessed it as we possess it, it would

have served to enrich his imagination and encourage his faith: it would have added brilliance to his vision of the world "balancing itself upon the wings of knowledge and of hope . . . upon its yet unwearied flight into the heaven of Time." The inexhaustible delight that we discover and rediscover in *The Cloud* is very largely due to our half-conscious sense of its perfect scientific truth.[1] The *Ode to Heaven* is the very essence of purest poetry distilled from an imagination which could be nourished equally on philosophy or religion, science or art:

First Spirit.

"Palace-roof of cloudless nights!
Paradise of golden lights!
Deep, immeasurable, vast,
Which art now, and which wert then
Of the Present and the Past,
Of the eternal Where and When,
Presence-chamber, temple, home,
Ever-canopying dome,
Of acts and ages yet to come!

"Glorious shapes have life in thee,
Earth, and all earth's company;
Living globes which ever throng
Thy deep chasms and wildernesses;
And green worlds that glide along;
And swift stars with flashing tresses;
And icy moons most cold and bright,
And mighty suns beyond the night,
Atoms of intensest light.

"Even thy name is as a god,
Heaven! for thou art the abode
Of that Power which is the glass
Wherein man his nature sees.
Generations as they pass
Worship thee with bended knees.
Their unremaining gods and they
Like a river roll away:
Thou remainest such—alway!—

Second Spirit.

"Thou art but the mind's first chamber,
Round which its young fancies clamber,
Like weak insects in a cave,
Lighted up by stalactites;
But the portal of the grave,

[1] But Shelley's inspired science is not, however, accurate enough to please some of his critics. Editors have actually consulted Greenwich astronomers to discover inaccuracies in the rising and setting of Shelley's stars! See for example, *Locock's* edition, vol. i, p. 578.

Where a world of new delights
  Will make thy best glories seem
  But a dim and noonday gleam
  From the shadow of a dream!

Third Spirit.

"Peace! the abyss is wreathed with scorn
At your presumption, atom-born!
  What is Heaven? and what are ye
Who its brief expanse inherit?
  What are suns and spheres which flee
With the instinct of that Spirit
  Of which ye are but a part?
  Drops which Nature's mighty heart
  Drives through thinnest veins! Depart!

"What is Heaven? a globe of dew,
Filling in the morning new
  Some eyed flower whose young leaves waken
On an unimagined world:
  Constellated suns unshaken,
Orbits measureless, are furled
  In that frail and fading sphere,
  With ten millions gathered there,
  To tremble, gleam, and disappear."

Shelley looked upon the universe with the eyes of an astronomer, not with those of a naturalist. To a very great extent he was working ahead of his medium of expression: he was seeking to describe stars as yet below the horizon, but he saw and felt their light. In 1817 he wrote to Godwin: "I am formed, if for anything not in common with the herd of mankind, to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling, whether relative to external nature or the living beings which surround us, and to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or the material universe as a whole." All that he means by this sentence it would be difficult to say. But undoubtedly his poems do treat of the universe as a whole to a very extraordinary degree. He sees the immortal spirit not divided by earthly space and time. His types of ideal man are shadowy because he measures them not by the past but by the future. "Obdurate Spirit!" cries the Christ of Hellas to Satan:

"Thou seest but the Past in the To-come.

. . . .

Boast not thine empire, dream not that thy worlds
Are more than furnace-sparks or rainbow-drops
Before the Power that wields and kindles them.
True greatness asks not space, true excellence
Lives in the Spirit of all things that live."

The infinite variety in which he represents the world, man and the elements, sorrow and joy, life and death, chance and change, has underlying it an all-pervading unity, as of a single heart animating the whole. Man is tameless and swift like the wind and fades like the clouds; the clouds and winds rejoice and sorrow and triumph like men; Time like a sea beats on the human heart; life is death and death is life; the One remains, the many change and pass. The song of the skylark is like moonlight, and the light of a star as the scent of a jonquil; music falls upon the heart like dew upon a violet; music and moonlight and feeling are one. All things are blent and kindred. All

> "Interpenetrated lie
> By the glory of the sky:
> Be it love, light, harmony,
> Odour, or the soul of all
> Which from Heaven like dew doth fall."

All thirst for the same fire; all feel, but never see, the "Lamp of Earth," the "Life of Life." All move towards the same mysterious goal.

From 1816 till his death Shelley drew his deepest inspiration from communion with that spirit of Love and Beauty and Life which in various forms he invokes, pursues, adores, embraces, and loses again—like the Psalmist, after whom he cried "Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest thou thyself in time of trouble?"

> "Spirit of Beauty that dost consecrate
> With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
> Of human thought or form—where art thou gone?
> Why dost thou pass away and leave our state
> This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?"

In his *Defence of Poetry* he writes: "We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression . . . it is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases." He claims that Poetry redeems from decay these visitations of the divinity in man. He could hardly claim anything higher, nor acknowledge himself a higher purpose. The divinity by whom Shelley felt himself visited may appear to some to be unapproachably abstract, for the poet succeeds in the unshaken determination

is only now beginning to be felt. Many people in this age are practically driven into atheism because they cannot attain for themselves to any conception of God consistent with a scientific and philosophical outlook on life. But Shelley conceived a century ago, a god who is both universal

be as vivid and sustaining as it undoubtedly was to Shelley when he gave poetic expression to the greatest of all his desires:

"I loved—oh no! I mean not one of ye,
Or any earthly one, though ye are dear
As human heart to human heart may be;
I loved I know not what. But this low sphere,
And all that it contains, contains not thee,—
Thou whom, seen nowhere, I feel everywhere.
From heaven and earth, and all that in them are,
Veiled art thou, like a [. . . . . .] star.

"By heaven and earth, from all whose shapes thou flowest,
Neither to be contained, delayed, nor hidden;
Making divine the loftiest and the lowest,
When for a moment thou art not forbidden
To live within the life which thou bestowest;
And leaving noblest things vacant and chidden,
Cold as a corpse after the spirit's flight,
Blank as the sun after the birth of night.

"In winds and trees and streams, and all things common;
In music, and the sweet unconscious tone
Of animals, and voices which are human,
Meant to express some feelings of their own;
In the soft motions and rare smile of woman;
In flowers and leaves; and in the grass fresh-shown,
Or dying in the autumn; I the most
Adore thee present, or lament thee lost."

There are "Arts though unimagined yet to be." As the

[1] See *The Triumph of Life*, lines 288–292.

is its principle of life. Shelley had a poetic style nobly descended from the great traditions. His themes were all his own. As life develops it tends to be lived more and more on two planes. What we experience within ourselves—our struggles after philosophy and faith, our daily fight to preserve hope without hardening ourselves against pity, our ever more clamorous demands and desires, our growing intuition of some higher state of being, all such things become more urgent and more significant as the spiritual life slowly and painfully gains upon the material.

> "There rises an unspeakable desire
> After the knowledge of our buried life;
> A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
> In tracking out our true original course;
> A longing to enquire
> Into the mystery of this heart which beats
> So wild, so deep in us—to know
> Whence our lives come and where they go." [1]

Shelley showed first when he composed *Alastor* that he would deal mainly with this side of human life—a side which to Arnold and his generation was anything but unreal. Yet he and his generation grievously misunderstood Shelley, and we have inherited their mistake; though we also are that Posterity for which he wrote, and we are even more sorely in need of the true teaching of the Romantic Poets. Science is now leading us into an ever more shadowy region and revealing that the external world, and all its shapes

> "Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;
> Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
> The Future and the Past are idle shadows
> Of thought's eternal flight—they have no being:
> Nought is but that which feels itself to be." [2]

By the light of Science we see that the veil is painted: only the imagination can lift the veil—only faith and poetry. Poetry is a guide to Reality.

Shelley was ambitious to write for the world of the universe. Like every great poet he needs to be often and deeply studied. His poems are not sensations for the moment; they are "mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present." [3] They cannot be measured—and no great poem can—by the judgment of a bare century. Nothing could be truer of Shelley than what he himself said of Dante: "His

[1] Arnold, *The Buried Life.* [2] *Hellas.*
[3] *Defence of Poetry*, ad fin.

very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with the lightning which has yet found no conductor. All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight."